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Postcolonialism in Eastern Europe

Advertising and femininity in the 1910s

Early cinema and empire

Fassbinder's processes of subjectification

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issue editor

Norman King

MOYA LUCKETT: Advertising and femininity: the case of *Our Mutual Girl* 363

KRISTEN WHISSEL: Uncle Tom, Goldilocks and the Rough Riders: early cinema's encounter with empire 384

ANIKÓ IMRE: White man, white mask: Mephisto meets Venus 405

THERESE GRISHAM: Processes of subjectification in Fassbinder's *I Only Want You to Love Me* 423

reports and debates

ANNETTE KUHN: *Crash* and film censorship in the UK 446

ALAN MCKEE: Researching the reception of indigenous affairs in Australia 451

SCOTT MACKENZIE: New Perspectives on Expressionist Film I. From Caligari to Kuhle Wampe: the Golden Age of German Cinema, 1919–32 454

reviews

SARAH STREET: Kenton Bamford, *Distorted Images: British National Identity and Film in the 1920s*; Jeffrey Richards (ed.), *The Unknown Thirties: an Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929–1939* 457

MARC SCHOLES: Peter Goodwin, *Television under the Tories: Broadcasting Policy, 1979–97*; Paul Bonner and Lesley Aston, *Independent Television to Britain, Volume 5. ITV & IBA 1981–92: the Old Relationship Changes* 461

RICHARD NEUPERT: Paul Wells, *Understanding Animation*; Kevin S. Sandler (ed.), *Reading the Rabbit: Explorations in Warner Bros. Animation* 467

PAMELA CHURCH GIBSON: Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* 472

index

Screen, vols 31–40 (1990–99) 475

cover illustration

Klaus Maria Brandauer and Rolf Hoppe in *Mephisto* (István Szabó, 1981). Picture courtesy: BFI Stills. Distributed by Cinegate.

Screen Studies Conference

30 June - 2 July 2000

University of Glasgow

The 10th *Screen Studies* Conference coincides with the 10th anniversary of the first Glasgow-based issue of the journal, marked by the publication of a millennial issue, vol. 41, no. 1. It seems timely, therefore, to look at the past and the future of all audiovisual media and the changing relationships between them.

The Conference will offer a mix of keynote addresses, panel and workshop sessions on these issues, as well as sessions on a wide range of other screen studies topics.

Proposals are invited for papers, and especially for pre-constituted panels.

Abstracts of 200 words to be sent to:
Caroline Beven • *Screen* • Gilmorehill Centre
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Proposal deadline • 17 January 2000.

Advertising and femininity: the case of *Our Mutual Girl*

MOYA LUCKETT

1 For further discussion of early cinema attractions see Tom Gunning, 'The cinema of attractions: early film, its spectator, and the avant garde', *Wide Angle*, vol. 8, nos 3–4 (1986), pp. 63–77; Tom Gunning, 'Now you see it, now you don't': the temporality of the cinema of attractions', *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 32 (Fall 1993), pp. 3–12. Linda Williams also discusses the erotic and gendered ancestry of the cinematic look and its attractions from its prehistory in the protocinematic photographic experiments of Eadweard Muybridge and others to the genre of early stag films. Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 34–92.

2 For further discussion of these trends, see Jane Gaines, 'From elephants to Lux soap: the programming and "flow" of early motion picture exploitation', *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 25 (Spring 1990), pp. 29–43; Moya Lockett, 'Cities and spectators: a historical analysis of film audiences in Chicago, 1910–1915' (University of Wisconsin-Madison PhD thesis, 1995), pp. 209–66.

During the mid 1910s, advertising played a pivotal role in transforming the motion picture industry, cementing its foundational role as an institution of sexual difference. Although gendered aspects of the cinematic look – both at the level of audience/spectator and the camera itself – were established even before cinema and seen in the likes of peephole 'attractions' and other risqué genres that foregrounded the erotic pleasures of the (male) look at the female body, the advertising-led developments of the 1910s tried to expand the medium's gendered address to the exhibition site and beyond.¹ The film industry's interests in moulding sexuality and interpellating gender through promotions built upon earlier practices pioneered by individual exhibitors, who were often self-employed and had complete control over the management of their moving picture shows and promotions. Their stunts – often borrowed from earlier practices associated with more 'low-brow' entertainments such as the circus – drew on the independent exhibitor-manager's understanding of his local audience, whose needs he would try to match through promotions that often drew upon his understanding of their class, race, gender and age, and stretched across the entire exhibition environment.² Corporate investments in advertising highlighted the industry's desire to create its own public, a desire that led production and distribution companies to seek greater control of exhibition and promotion. Through acquiring their own theatres and investing in more expensive, more comprehensive and more centralized promotions, the larger film companies would be able to intervene more strongly in the production of their publics, an enterprise that

3 For further discussion of women's leisure during this period, see Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1986).

4 See, for example, Lauren Rabinovitz, *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Shelley Stamp Lindsey, 'Is any girl safe?: female spectators at the white slave films', *Screen*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1996), pp. 1–15.

5 Janet Staiger, 'Announcing wares, winning patrons, voicing ideals: thinking about the history and theory of film advertising', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1990), p. 27, fn. 37. It is also important to stress that Mutual planned to handle its feature films separately at the time it launched its *Our Mutual Girl* campaign through a subsidiary called Federal Features. 'Mutual features ready', *Variety*, vol. 33, no. 2 (12 December 1913), p. 13.

6 For a more detailed discussion of early film advertising see Janet Staiger, 'Combination and litigation: structures of US film distribution, 1896–1917', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 23, no. 2 (1983), pp. 3–31.

7 Note that there was only a fine line separating fan magazines and the in-house promotional journals produced by film exchanges, whose similarities did not rest with content. Even the independently-produced fan magazines like *Photoplay* had some kind of corporate affiliation. *Photoplay* was affiliated with the Independents, *Motion Picture Classic* and *Motion Picture Magazine* were edited by Vitagraph's J. Stuart Blackton and (despite its disavowals) the Chicago-based trade journal, *Motography* appeared to be associated with local companies Essanay and Selig.

8 'Lederer a movie maker: to produce feature films', *Variety*, vol. 31, no. 12 (22 August 1913), p. 14.

increasingly involved stronger intervention in the production of gendered identities.

Capitalizing on the social transformations associated with the current progressive social and political climate, film companies redesigned their advertising to attract the increasing numbers of women who were becoming more firmly associated with the 'semi-public' life of theatres, cinemas, shopping centres, zoos, dance halls and restaurants.³ Women (particularly middle- and upper-class women) also ensured greater respectability for the film show, something that the industry actively sought with moves to upgrade its product, reach more affluent and respectable audiences and raise production budgets and ticket prices.⁴ Creating a 'respectable' cinema that appealed to women – the 'gentle', 'moral', 'upstanding' sex – would also help offset calls for Federal Censorship that mushroomed in the wake of the 1913 Mutual vs Ohio Case's ruling that films in the USA were not protected by the First Amendment as they were not speech but a commodity.

The fifty-two-episode-long, fashion-oriented Reliance serial, *Our Mutual Girl* (1914–15) was perhaps the most remarkable instance of cinema's investment in femininity and advertising. The subject of 'very early national advertising', as Janet Staiger has noted, *Our Mutual Girl* was provided free to exhibitors as the figurehead for the Mutual programme of one-reel, two-reel and serial films, forming a trademark for the exchange as a whole.⁵ As well as representing one of the earliest attempts to define the film audience through gender, *Our Mutual Girl* provided a focus for the exchange, serving to familiarize viewers with the Mutual trademark.

As has been noted elsewhere, the film industry was relatively late to recognize the importance of advertising its films to a general public, restricting promotions to internal trade publicity until 1912–13.⁶ Production companies and film exchanges promoted new releases to exhibitors through the trade press or their own in-house magazines such as Mutual's *The Mutual Observer* and its successor, *Reel Life*. These publications combined trade-press-style features (including schedules and announcements of future releases, capsule reviews, information about front-office personnel and trades organizations, reports on future productions, business, technical and promotional information for exhibitors) with fan-magazine-style reports on films and players, and were initially aimed solely at exhibitors. By 1913, they increasingly resembled fan magazines and were being sold to audiences at their local theatres.⁷ The name change of Mutual's in-house paper from the official-sounding *The Mutual Observer* to the more popular *Reel Life* in August 1913 underlines this shift, as well as signalling Mutual's new carefully-moulded identity.⁸ Theatre owners, on the other hand, traditionally invested in promoting the amenities of their theatres over individual films, largely because this represented their major investment, but

9 See, for example, John D. Rathburn, *Motion Picture Making and Exhibiting* (Chicago, IL: Charles C. Thompson Company, 1914); Epes Winthrop Sargent, *Picture Theatre Advertising* (New York: The Moving Picture World/Chalmers Publishing Company, 1915).

10 'Independent combination against "picture trust"', *Variety*, vol. 32, no. 10 (7 November 1913), p. 15.

11 Unlike the 1908–12 battles for control of distribution outlined by Janet Staiger, these struggles favoured such strategies as: advertising; the adoption of new technologies; the innovation of new production trends, such as serials and feature-length films; and the move to showcase films within larger and more lavish movie theatres. Staiger, 'Combination and litigation', pp. 41–72, esp. pp. 41–56.

12 'Mutual's novelty', *Variety*, vol. 32, no. 2 (21 November 1913), p. 8.

also because films would change too frequently to warrant any concentrated publicity. As late as 1915, when feature-length films started to saturate the market, exhibitors' manuals and advice columns in the trades continued to insist that advertising should centre not on films but on the theatre, as this was the major attraction for audiences.⁹ These claims seem increasingly defensive, given the rise of the star system and the success of individual titles such as *Quo Vadis?* (Enrico Guazzoni, 1913), *Traffic in Souls* (George Loane Tucker, 1913) and, of course, *The Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915), suggesting instead exhibitors' resistance to having their small, independent businesses controlled by the large picture producer–distributor combines that were becoming increasingly more powerful as mergers and expansion strengthened their position.

As the length of films expanded and budgets escalated, production companies in turn invested in advertising to fight off competition from their new larger rivals. Borrowing the idea of a nationwide distribution network of film exchanges from the Motion Picture Patents Company-controlled General Film Company (GFC), rival independents consolidated into several exchanges, the largest of which were Mutual and Universal. By November 1913, Mutual's and Universal's joint output exceeded the number of reels released by GFC, leading *Variety* to speculate about a Universal/Mutual merger.¹⁰ In effect, both companies' planned expansions suggested the opposite: the independents were no longer a unified concern. Instead, Mutual and Universal were engaged in a battle to dominate the market, using modern business methods rather than legal battles over patents.¹¹

Competition between Mutual and Universal was marked by both companies sharply increasing their publicity budgets and orienting their advertising towards a new audience – the general public. The advertising campaigns initiated by Mutual and Universal in 1913 combined innovation and established practices. Many of Mutual's promotional activities distinguished it as a particularly *feminine* brand, a strategy encapsulated in *Our Mutual Girl*, its advertising and related tie-ins. An advance notice in *Variety* proclaimed:

A new film of the Mutual company will present Norma Phillips in a new Mutual series entitled 'Our Mutual Girl', a serial presenting Miss Phillips as a country girl in a weekly changing succession of adventures in and around New York, and involving the particular people and landmarks identified with the locale of each adventure.¹²

Our Mutual Girl represented an unusual synthesis of advertising and cinema as it was delivered at no cost to theatres showing the Mutual programme. Publicity stressed that rival exchanges did not offer this degree of support, emphasizing that their more comprehensive service would increase patronage – a loyal core audience as opposed to

- 13 See Mutual's advertisements: 'Making patrons for your theater', *The Moving Picture World*, vol. 18, no. 12 (20 December 1913), p. 1471; 'MUTUAL movies service supplies more than films', *Variety*, vol. 33, no. 4 (26 December 1913), p. 34. Patronage was a key issue of the day, with editorials and advice columns in *The Moving Picture World* stressing its importance, encouraging exhibitors not to show scandalous or disreputable films in the hopes of a one-off gain.
- 14 Warren I. Susman, *Culture As History: the Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1973), pp. 271–80.
- 15 See Sargent, *Picture Theater Advertising*, esp. p. 3. His regular columns in *The Moving Picture World* espouse the same philosophy throughout 1914.

- 16 'Novel ad for Mutual exhibitors', *The Moving Picture World*, vol. 18 no. 12 (20 December 1913), p. 1427.

occasional viewers.¹³ The promotions centred around *Our Mutual Girl* pioneered new ways of thinking about the movies, simultaneously focusing in on discrete textual features and extending cinematic address beyond theatres to situate films within diverse sites of feminine culture.

Warren I. Susman has observed that ideas of 'personality' generally dominated advertising techniques during the early 1910s. While it was believed the best way to distinguish an individual or commodity from the crowd, personality had the added advantage of being a characteristic that might be acquired through certain standards of behaviour – including educated consumer choices – unlike older ideas of character, which were seen as innate.¹⁴ Movie advertising had already adopted personality advertising, associating 'personality' not with films, but with 'the personality of the house', a concept that foregrounded the individual style of the manager himself and his role as a community leader.¹⁵ The exhibitor was an important link in the chain of personality and patronage, providing the service and expertise that mediated and shaped the film's reception – and with it, the potential transformations that the film might have upon the spectator, ensuring that they were in keeping with the best personality ideals.

Mutual's 1913–14 campaign was among the first to associate ideals of personality with films as well as the theatre, indicating a marked shift in thinking about the lure of cinema and the role of film publicity – one that effectively erased much of the exhibitor's role in reception. Adopting ideals of personality advertising, Mutual disguised its expansionist desires to set itself apart from the competition. Using a combination of older promotional styles and more cutting-edge tactics, Mutual refurbished its entire image to create a corporate unity that encompassed its films, film service, promotional artefacts and even independently-owned client theatres. Mutual provided free trademark 'wing-éd clock' arch lamps to exhibitors to decorate and illuminate the outside of their theatres, marking them as places showing the Mutual programme.¹⁶ Useful and decorative, the lamps assured exhibitors that Mutual's service was second to none, while extending the exchange's control over the theatrical environment and, with the advent of *Our Mutual Girl*, programming itself.

As part of their expansion, Mutual's agents pillaged the stock companies and personnel of the former market leaders, compiling a roster of well-known film talent to herald a new cinematic era for their affiliated companies. In November 1913 they signed D.W. Griffith, perhaps the biggest name in pictures, to an exclusive contract for 'more than \$2500 per week' to

produce large screen attractions for the Reliance and Majestic Companies and [to] supervise the pictures in script form for the

entire Mutual program as well as act in an advisory capacity to all the Mutual's producing companies.¹⁷

Frank Woods, the 'Spectator' of the *New York Dramatic Mirror* and former head of the Biograph scenario department, was hired as head of Mutual's script department. Former newspaper man and 'well-known playwright' Russell E. Smith was engaged as scenario writer and editor, while William Bitzer, Edward Dillon, William C. Cabanne, and James Kirkwood were lured from Biograph to assist Griffith. A number of performers were also signed, including members of Griffith's Biograph stock company like Blanche Sweet, and principal actors from other companies, including Vitagraph leading man Frank Bennett.

Mutual's investments also included real estate and related technical concerns, prefiguring the rise of vertical integration. In December 1913 it took over Carlton Motion Pictures laboratories and completed construction of the new Reliance studio and factory in Yonkers.¹⁸ Early in 1914 it was well on its way to establishing a small chain of New York theatres, leasing Weber's for features only, the neighbouring Bijou for short and mixed programmes and the Metropolitan Rink, which it planned to convert into a 600-seat 'theatre de luxe' with 'most of the seats being in the form of private boxes, luxuriously appointed and designed to cater to the elite'. Other plans included acquiring a Broadway theatre to showcase its feature films.¹⁹

Mutual took similar care in staffing its new advertising department. On 14 November 1913, the same month Mutual signed Griffith, *Variety* reported that Mutual had hired Phillip Mindil – 'one of the most experienced general publicity men in New York' – to head its press and advertising department. The founder of *Vanity Fair*, Mindil was also the owner of a 'general publicity business', a theatrical publicist, and the former dramatic editor of the *Commercial Advisor*.²⁰ His background encompassed the live stage, women's magazine publishing and general business promotions – skills he would draw upon in choreographing Mutual's campaigns. His hiring marked a new sophistication in film promotion. Following Mindil's appointment in January 1914, Mutual opened its own poster department, and, as Janet Staiger notes, 'hired Cheltenham Advertising Service to innovate a new poster style'.²¹ Mindil's responsibilities included generating publicity for the nascent serial, *Our Mutual Girl*.

Universal engaged in similar expansion during late 1913, increasing its output of features, hiring Allan Dwan to establish a company specializing in 'large productions', and opening a large London office to expand European operations.²² In keeping with its decision to use feature films to promote its regular programme of mixed shorts, Universal set about acquiring a prominently located

17 'David W. (Lawrence) Griffith with Mutual', *The Moving Picture World*, vol. 18, no. 6 (8 November 1913), p. 591 states that Griffith was hired 'to produce large screen attractions for the Reliance and Majestic Companies and [to] supervise the pictures in script form for the entire Mutual program as well as act[ing] in an advisory capacity to all the Mutual's producing companies'. Also see 'Independent combination against "picture trust"', p. 15.

18 'Mutual absorption', *Variety*, vol. 33, no. 4 (26 December 1913), p. 13; 'New Reliance plant', *Variety*, vol. 33, no. 2 (12 December 1913), p. 13.

19 'Mutual's experiment', *Variety*, vol. 33, no. 13 (27 February 1914), p. 21.

20 'Mutual signs Mindil', *Variety*, vol. 32, no. 11 (14 November 1913), p. 14. Norma Phillips – star of *Our Mutual Girl* – was also a *Variety* cover girl this week, her photo taking centre stage, flanked by smaller images of Vivian Martin, Florence LaBadie and Pauline Bush.

21 Staiger, 'Announcing wares', p. 8.

22 'Changes in personnel of Universal coast companies', *The Moving Picture World*, vol. 18, no. 6 (8 November 1913), p. 619; 'Independent combination against "picture trust"', p. 15.

New York theatre. In November 1913, *Variety* announced that it had

beaten Vitagraph to it in a race for a Broadway Theatre. The feature subject turned out by the Imp, *The Traffic in Souls* [sic] will land on Broadway several weeks before *The Christian*, for which picture the Vitagraph has been getting ready to move into the Criterion. *The Traffic in Souls* will be seen at the Joe Weber playhouse beginning next Monday. . . . The presentation of this U. feature is explanatory. *The U. wants a theatre permanently on the big street to keep its novelties advertised.*²³

In November 1913, the same month Mutual hired Mindil, Universal appointed Chicago advertising executive Witt K. Cochran to head its publicity department.²⁴ It also marked an additional \$250,000 for advertising *outside* the trades, a move that stimulated an advertising war with Mutual.²⁵

Corporate expansion offered many advantages, not least the possibility of controlling the market, greater diversification of product and economies of scale. Nonetheless, these all came at the possible cost of corporate identity – a matter of prime importance at this time. This problem was exacerbated because several of the newer, larger companies were alliances of pre-existing firms with separate arms for ‘regular’ (short films) and feature distribution. Nonetheless, diversity continued to be an asset as most programmes still consisted of a combination of short films. During 1913–14, for example, Mutual carried Kay-Bee, American, Keystone, Broncho, Reliance, Thanouser, Majestic, Punch, Great Northern, Pilot, Gaumont, Mutual Education, Excelsior, Lux and Solax. Despite Mutual’s decision to adopt a more ‘feminine’ corporate identity for the exchange as a whole, not all its affiliates made films designed for women, and some brands like Broncho, which specialized in Westerns, had decidedly masculine appeal.²⁶ Although Mutual’s films included such female-oriented melodramas as *Frou Frou* (four reels, 1914), *Moths* (four reels, 1914), *Sapho* (six reels, 1914) and Griffith’s 1914 films *The Battle of the Sexes* and *Home Sweet Home*, many more of its films were about war, battles and male action-centred subjects. In addition to its Mexican War newsreels and its split-reel comedies and Westerns, many of its feature-length subjects were aggressively masculine, like *The Mountain Rat* (four reels, 1914), described in Mutual’s publicity as ‘a tense vital drama of Western Life, telling the story of a human rat’, *Gangsters* (four reels, 1914) and Thomas Ince’s *The Wrath of the Gods* (1914), described as ‘Six smashing, thrilling reels of concentrated drama. . . . Volcano in Eruption! Filling theatres.’²⁷ Even advertising for the more feminine releases – particularly those with potential cross-gender appeal like the Griffith films – often had an equally masculine address, with the bucolic domestic drama *Home Sweet Home*

²³ ‘First to Broadway’, *Variety*, vol. 32, no. 12 (12 November 1913), p. 8 (emphasis mine).

²⁴ Staiger, ‘Announcing wares’, p. 13.

²⁵ ‘Universal starts big advertising campaign’, *The Moving Picture World*, vol. 18, no. 6 (6 November 1913), p. 618.

²⁶ Film exchanges provided exhibitors with a complete programme largely based upon one- and two-reel films, although they also handled some features. Film exchanges marketed and distributed films produced by a group of affiliated production companies, releasing each producer’s films on certain days within a regular and predetermined schedule. The identity of each programme was constituted more by those brand names released each day than through the individual films.

²⁷ Descriptions from *Reel Life*, vol. V, no. 10 (21 November 1914), p. 29.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

29 *The Saturday Evening Post*, vol. 186, no. 21 (22 November 1913).

30 *Variety*, vol. 33, no. 1 (13 December 1913), p. 26. Mutual's advertisement in *The Moving Picture World* (13 December 1913), p. 1325, promised 'they will keep asking for "The Mutual Girl" for months to come'.

31 Advertisement in *Variety*, vol. 32, no. 13 (28 November 1913), p. 23.

32 'David W. (Lawrence) Griffith with Mutual', p. 591; 'Independent combination against "picture trust"', p. 15.

33 Advertisement in *Variety*, vol. 32, no. 13 (28 November 1913), p. 36; *The Moving Picture World*, vol. 18, no. 10 (6 December 1913), pp. 1176-7.

34 *The Moving Picture World*, vol. 18, no. 6 (8 November 1913), pp. 568-9.

described as 'Six reels of heart appeal, tense interest, vital action and gorgeous investiture'.²⁸

During November 1913, Mutual launched its public advertising campaign in *The Saturday Evening Post* with a full-page advertisement announcing the forthcoming serial *Our Mutual Girl*, which would debut two months later on 19 January 1914.²⁹ This was the first publicity the exchange placed outside the trades, appearing one week after *Variety* announced the serial's impending release. By advertising first in the high-circulation *Post* (which sold over two million copies per week), Mutual ensured widespread national exposure, generated curiosity and stimulated demand for its forthcoming trademark serial. With advertisements in the trade press proclaiming 'Thousands of people are asking when they can see "The MUTUAL Girl"', exhibitors could be forgiven for switching exchanges – the only way to obtain this hot new attraction.³⁰

On 28 November 1913, one week before launching the trade campaign for *Our Mutual Girl*, Mutual again broke new ground, placing two full-page advertisements in *Variety*, then a vaudeville-oriented paper that featured almost no film publicity. One of these advertisements was the much-quoted announcement of D.W. Griffith's films and innovations. This blurred editorial and advertising boundaries as it did not bear the Mutual name.³¹ Readers would know that Griffith had signed with Mutual to make films for Reliance and Majestic as this had already been announced in *Variety* and *The Moving Picture World*.³² Much of Mutual's advertising under Mindil was characterized by this blurring of editorial and promotional boundaries, a practice incarnated in *Our Mutual Girl*. The other advertisement, featured on *Variety*'s back cover, heralded the start of 'MUTUAL'S Campaign to spend HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS in the most stirring advertising ever written'.³³ This was probably in response to Universal, whose advertisement in *The Moving Picture World* had just proclaimed: 'Universal to spend quarter of a million dollars on national advertising campaign'.³⁴

Breaking with tradition, Mindil orchestrated a unified publicity campaign, using the same strategies to address audiences, exhibitors and the trade. Simultaneously, he moved film advertising into a new, more public arena: Mutual's advertisements in *The Post* were amongst its first film advertisements, and the only ones until Paramount inaugurated its equally high-profile publicity drive on 5 September 1914. In *Variety*'s words, 'Mutual's publicity campaign jolted competitors to life', noting that Mutual's 'recent aggressive, widespread and sensational newspaper outlays' had forever transformed film advertising:

The Mutual, for the first time in the history of film newspaper advertising, plunged into the daily papers of several cities last

35 'Mutual publicity campaign jolts competitors to life', *Variety*, vol. 33, no. 2 (12 December 1913), p. 13.

36 Advertisement, *The Moving Picture World*, vol. 18, no. 10 (6 December 1913).

37 Mary Beth Haralovich, 'Advertising heterosexuality', *Screen*, vol. 23, no. 2 (1982), pp. 179–98.

38 Sime, review of *Our Mutual Girl* episodes 4 and 5, *Variety*, vol. 33, no. 11 (13 February 1914), p. 24.

39 Richard de Cordova, *Picture Personalities: the Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), pp. 7–97.

40 'Picture actors are asking for names on the screen', *Variety*, vol. 32, no. 12 (21 November 1913), p. 8.

Sunday, taking half pages to cry the Mutual's claims to movie patrons attentions. The Mutual's heads believe the approbrium carelessly meted out to the movies by some newspapers . . . will be swung around to a more sympathetic understanding of the moral good of the films when the manufacturers and exhibitors make the newspapers their forum.³⁵

Immediately, the GFC set aside \$250,000 to advertise to the general public, while Universal summoned advertising executive Joe Brandt to New York to explain why their advertisements had not appeared.

Whereas Universal's publicity stressed variety, Mutual stressed brand identity by emphasizing trademarks. Early Mutual trade advertisements insisted that 'Everybody is looking for the 'sign of the wing-éd clock', and emphasized the 'hundreds of thousands of dollars' spent to make the Mutual clock 'the most-talked-about sign in the world'.³⁶ Mutual's trademark clock was displayed far more prominently than the Universal globe, while, unlike Universal, Mutual developed a slogan, 'Mutual movies make time fly'. This had a predominantly feminine address that contrasted with the ungended universality of Universal's globe, creating a distinctively feminine personality for the exchange. Throughout Mutual's early campaign, women are associated with leisure and spare time. Viewers were accordingly forced to wait two months for the debut of *Our Mutual Girl*, a waiting period filled with teasers promising the pleasures to come. As Mary Beth Haralovich has observed, the concept of waiting is characteristically feminine, and featured prominently in later Hollywood promotional campaigns.³⁷ *Variety* later testified to the success of these campaigns, noting the widespread dissemination of Mutual's feminine image: 'there is not a woman anywhere, whether in New York, Frisco or Canojoharie who can withstand a visit to an entrance beneath the Mutual's clock, knowing that she will see "clothes"''.³⁸

Our Mutual Girl promoted the Mutual name in a manner that recalled the association of unidentified players and 'picture personalities' with production companies.³⁹ Before names were released to the public, favourite actors were identified by brand names ('The Biograph Girl' or 'The Vitagraph Girl'), highlighting corporate ties rather than individual identities. Significantly, the debate about naming actors was at its peak in November 1913, coinciding with the initial advertisements for *Our Mutual Girl*. *Variety* noted that all actors were demanding credits, while starring players were starting to argue about who should be billed first.⁴⁰ The seemingly regressive practice of subsuming the star's name and identity underneath the Mutual banner underscores the exchange's investment in promoting a corporate personality. Breaking with the serial tradition of naming heroines after stars, as with Mary Fuller in

Edison's *What Happened To Mary* or Kathlyn Williams in Selig's *The Adventures of Kathlyn*, *Our Mutual Girl*'s protagonist was named Margaret and played by Norma Phillips. To prevent confusion, viewers were encouraged to refer to her as 'the Mutual girl'.⁴¹

This use of a woman as trademark drew on contemporary exploitation strategies that increasingly feminized the consumer. For example, the 1913–14 advertising campaign for the National Commercial Gas Association prominently featured a fictional heroine, Nancy Gay. Each advertisement was centred around a brief narrative about the easier and better lifestyle resulting from her use of Commercial Gas. Nancy Gay used the time formerly taken up by domestic chores for leisure, positioning women as the key market for a diverse range of public and private amusements.⁴² Readers who were already hooked could write in for more free Nancy Gay stories, revealing how serials lent themselves to marketing goods to female consumers. As a trademark for the Mutual programme, *Our Mutual Girl* similarly appealed to women as consumers, suggesting that cinema might be the way to fill all that free time. Furthermore, these personalities adopted consumerist ideals that the spectator might internalize through the transformative power of film spectatorship – a move in keeping with the whole structure of personality advertising itself.

Even before its release, the trades were touting *Our Mutual Girl* as an entirely new development in motion pictures. In an illustrated, one-page article published three weeks before the debut of *Our Mutual Girl*, *The Moving Picture World* announced:

here's something new in the picture line, now that serial motion picture productions have become popular, and it is strictly a woman's series, too. . . . To be exact, the 'Mutual Girl' series is to be a fashion subject, and Miss Phillips is to have the great pleasure of wearing 'some clothes'.⁴³

Just as Nancy Gay glamorized the utility of gas, *Our Mutual Girl* promoted cinema to women through fashion, consumption and city life. *The Moving Picture World* enumerated the smart gowns Miss Phillips would wear, detailing costs as follows:

[H]ere are a few of the items that figure in the making of the Mutual Girl series: stockings \$20; shoes \$15; lingerie at \$50 per garment, gowns at \$150 to \$400, wraps at the same figure, furs at \$300 a set, hats \$75, and gloves, six pairs for each picture at \$4 a pair. To insure that the 'Girl' shall be properly dressed in these gorgeous gowns a dressmaker has been employed at a cost of \$75 per week to keep her 'duds' in order and 'hook up the back' or tell her if 'her hat is on straight' – all very important trifles to a well dressed woman. She will ride about in a \$6700 motor car

41 An interview with Phillips in *Reel Life* underscores this point. The interviewer asks the following question: 'Miss Phillips . . . though many people know and love you all over the United States, you're still a great mystery to us all. Is your real name Margaret?' 'The personal side of the pictures', *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 17 (11 July 1914), p. 19.

42 The National Commercial Gas Association advertising campaign, *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1913–14.

43 'Mutual Girl series', *The Moving Picture World*, vol. 18, no. 13 (27 December 1913), p. 1525.

44 Ibid.

45 'Mutual starts things', *The Moving Picture World*, vol. 18, no. 11 (13 December 1913), p. 1260.

46 Judith Still, *Feminine Economies: Thinking Against the Market in the Enlightenment and the Late Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 1–34, 181–6.

47 Ibid., p. 2.

48 Advertisement in *Variety*, vol. 33, no. 3 (19 December 1913), p. 36.

49 Advertisement in *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 11 (30 May 1914), p. 36.

attended by a footman and driven by a chauffeur whose combined salaries is [sic] \$300 per month.⁴⁴

This expense suggests how *Our Mutual Girl* could be marketed as a 'prestige production'. Indeed, the trades initially reported that Griffith would direct, although this was possibly planted to enhance the serial's visibility and prestige.⁴⁵ Instead, this investment was oriented towards more feminine forms of expenditure and consumer culture.

Besides offering women the vicarious pleasures of watching another woman buying the latest fashions and wearing pretty clothes, the serial was made available in a manner allied to 'feminine economics'. *Our Mutual Girl* was provided free to exhibitors, positioning it as a gift. While viewers still had to pay, they would later receive their own gift from Mutual – the free tie-in magazine, *Our Mutual Girl Weekly*. Judith Still suggests that gifts are pivotal to feminine economies and, as such, can be opposed to market economies.⁴⁶ Drawing on concepts of unpaid (women's) work, gifts suggest an alternative economy that is 'antithetical to work'.⁴⁷ While Mutual clearly was not opposed to the market, it was drawing on traditions that, as Still points out, resonate as feminine. Correspondingly, the idea of the gift is foregrounded in Mutual's advertising. Exhibitor-oriented copy combined market-oriented appeals with references to Mutual's free gifts:

Do you want these big audiences in your theater or do you want them to go to the theater across the street? If you want to swell your box office receipts, get the MUTUAL service in your theater quickly, and then hook up with the MUTUAL advertising by displaying the MUTUAL SOLAR LIGHT in front of your box office and by using all the other forms of advertising we give you, so that the advertising becomes the advertising of your own theater.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, advertisements aimed at audiences not only underlined the complementary nature of Mutual's product, but also foregrounded its exclusively feminine address:

Every Moving Picture Patron Insists on Having *Our Mutual Girl Weekly* – The Smartest Thing In Movieland. *This Artistic Magazine Cannot Be Bought* and Is to be had only where Mutual Girl pictures are shown. Bears on its cover a beautiful pencil portrait of Our Mutual Girl by Jean Parke. Contains the Current Story of Our Mutual Girl. People and Places visited by Our Mutual Girl. Men's and Women's fashions drawn and described by experts. Hints on beauty and health. Coupons to secure free of charge May Manton Dress Patterns.⁴⁹

While these elements were presented as desirable, they were precisely unnecessary additions, superfluous pleasures that were not

required to make sense of the film's plot. Their supplementary nature was, however, central to the kind of personality they helped construct for Mutual films. As Naomi Schor has observed, non-essential characteristics help 'discriminate between mass-produced objects'.⁵⁰ This is precisely because

the superfluous structural element serves to 'personalise' the industrial object, to make of it . . . a pseudo-unique object. 'Optional' features provide the individual consumer with the illusion that the mass-produced object he [sic] has purchased is moulded to his specifications and his alone. Second . . . the marginal element serves to naturalise the industrially produced object, to deny . . . its status as industrial object.⁵¹

Additional features like magazines and patterns helped remove Mutual's films from mere mass production, offering instead the illusion of personalized care embodied in patronage itself. In this respect, *Our Mutual Girl Weekly* and the May Manton patterns articulated a form of cinema which structurally resembled fashion. As Roland Barthes has observed, mass audiences are allowed to participate in fashion, creating their own customized appearance through manipulating details and accessorizing through supplements, both of which, in turn, depend on mass production.⁵²

Feminine narratives: consumerist detours vs the 'well-made' play

Our Mutual Girl's much-touted combination of narrative and fashion spectacle was not an entirely new development. As Ben Singer observes, 'the serial-queen melodrama's promotion of "fashion interest", [was] apparent both in the mise-en-scene of the serials and in extra-textual merchandising tie-ins with fashion houses. With very few exceptions, serials placed great emphasis upon luxurious fashion'.⁵³ Fashion was not, however, merely part of the mise-en-scene of *Our Mutual Girl* but acquired a prominence that troubled some reviewers. In his review of the first episode's premiere at Loew's Broadway Theatre, *The Moving Picture World*'s critic praised the opening scenes narrating country-girl Margaret's move to New York, but claimed that he – and the audience – were less satisfied:

when the picture began to be concerned with Madame Lucille's pretty models and the latest fashions in gowns. . . . They make one suspect that such gowns as New York can furnish are the real object of this first part of the picture and not the girl's adventures.⁵⁴

Dismissing the serial as fragmented, flawed and inherently low-brow, he concludes that it might appeal to more rural audiences, an observation that seems to be supported by *The Moving Picture*

⁵⁰ Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 55

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57

⁵² Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, quoted in Schor, *Reading in Detail*, pp. 57–8

⁵³ Ben Singer, 'Female power in the serial-queen melodrama: the etiology of an anomaly', *Camera Obscura*, vol. 22 (January 1992), p. 100

⁵⁴ *Mutual Girl entertainers Broadway: The Moving Picture World*, vol. 19, no. 5 (31 January 1914), p. 523

⁵⁵ 'Exhibitors news', Billy Bison's report from North Western New York and Murray's report from Missouri, *The Moving Picture World*, vol. 19, no. 8 (21 February 1914), pp. 854, 981. William's report from Indiana, *The Moving Picture World*, vol. 19, no. 11 (14 March 1914), p. 1402.

⁵⁶ *The Moving Picture World* was a staunch defender of cinematic art, particularly during the 1913–14 period when movies were under siege from a variety of local censors and moralists.

⁵⁷ Cinema, 'From our London correspondent', *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 9 (16 May 1914), p. 26.

⁵⁸ The Eavesdropper, 'Heard in studio and exchange', *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 6 (25 April 1914), p. 14.

⁵⁹ 'Stories of the new photoplays', *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 25 (5 September 1914), p. 8.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Helene Cixous, *Coming to Writing and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Schor, *Reading In Detail*.

⁶¹ It is worth noting that the serial/series distinction does not seem to be as clear-cut in the trade discourse of the 1910s.

World's local reports, which reveal its popularity in Buffalo, Kansas City and Tipton, Indiana.⁵⁵

While *Our Mutual Girl* did not meet *The Moving Picture World's* standards of a well-made play, its appeal was broader and more cosmopolitan than its critic predicted, extending to city-dwellers and society women.⁵⁶ In May 1914, *Reel Life* commented on its popularity in London, adding: 'The Pictures of costumes at the various famous establishments visited by Margaret will make a very powerful appeal to the ladies'.⁵⁷ One month earlier, *Reel Life* reported that it had set a new trend among society women from coast to coast: *Our Mutual Girl* box parties. Pioneered by Mrs Marshall Augustus Newell of Portland, these involved groups of well-connected female friends reserving boxes to watch the serial's latest episode before going out for tea in a hotel. *Reel Life* describes one soiree as follows:

The hostess and her daughter, Miss Alma Haines, received the guests in the theatre parlor. At the opening of the performance, they were seated in the boxes in the balcony circle. 'Our Mutual Girl' was watched with a shower of applause, and the reel was watched with intense interest through all the details of Margaret's Easter preparations. Her choice of costumes met with enthusiastic approval, and her sweet girlishness charmed everyone. After the theatre, the guests were taken in automobiles to the Multnomah Hotel where tea was served and all exchanged delighted comments on 'Our Mutual Girl' and Mrs. Newell's original entertainment.⁵⁸

Instead of being merely a lower-brow/failed narrative model most suited to the unsophisticated rural masses, *Our Mutual Girl's* less linear structure might be seen as a more 'feminine' model of storytelling. After all, Mutual's efforts to capture the feminine *Zeitgeist* extended beyond fashion to hiring women writers like Carolyn Wells. Wells authored episodes of the serial that dealt with Margaret's maternal feelings towards abandoned baby Lily, suggesting that Mutual might have felt that only a woman could capture such desires.⁵⁹ Structurally, too, *Our Mutual Girl* exhibits the non-linear, fragmented, decentred form that later critics believe characterize 'feminine' texts.⁶⁰

Indeed, *Our Mutual Girl* distinguished itself from other serials (and confounded some contemporary critics) through its lack of narrative cohesion. Midway between the narratively self-sufficient episodes of a series and the continuous, suspense-laden serial, *Our Mutual Girl* lacked goal-driven serial narratives. Instead, it borrowed from women's magazines, with their customary detours through narrative, spectacle, advice, fashion and beauty.⁶¹ Each narrative was punctuated by Margaret's visits to stores, landmarks and famous people's homes – elements *The Moving Picture World* dismissed as extraneous. Rather than forming a supplementary pleasure or

⁶² Sime, review of *Our Mutual Girl* episodes 4 and 5, p. 24.

⁶³ Schor, *Reading in Detail*, p. 4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Elizabeth Cowie, *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: the Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987); Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989); Constance Penley, *The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

supporting the narrative, these 'detours' comprised a large part of the drama's appeal. As *Variety* observed, 'The plot gives the series a safe foundation, but the clothes, the scenes of New York and the interesting views of the greatest city in the world . . . are going to create a demand for "Our Mutual Girl" that should indefinitely prolong the weekly release of it'.⁶² Instead of ideals of narrative efficiency, *Our Mutual Girl* adopts a narrative model based on consumerist detours, structuring its stories around a consumerist way of seeing – a sometimes aimless 'shopping around' that emphasizes the visual pleasures of costume and detail, that foregrounds the pleasures of chance and coincidence over careful planning and efficiency.

This perspective suggests another, specifically feminine, narrative told from the margins of shopping and focusing on the minutiae of costuming and style. As Naomi Schor notes, 'to retell the story from the perspective of the detail is inevitably to tell another story. . . . The detail does not occupy a conceptual space beyond the laws of sexual difference: the detail is gendered and doubly gendered as feminine'.⁶³ For Schor, the detail is 'doubly feminine' as it is both ornamental and everyday and, as such, often associated with domesticity and private life. Consequently, she notes that the detail has often been seen as an inferior and often extraneous form, appealing to the eye rather than the mind.⁶⁴ Together, these assumptions have led to the widespread idea that feminine perception is limited by the detail, embedded in it, with female spectators/readers consequently finding themselves unable to see the larger picture, and consequently not capable of thinking in broader or more abstract terms.⁶⁵ Detail thus fragments attention and ties women to the material, characteristics that were generally maligned prior to modernity, but might be transformed into assets in a secular era of mass production and distraction. Rather than perceiving feminine investment in surface, in fragments, as something inherently limited, Schor offers a theory of feminine reading practices that, while it leans towards essentialism, recuperates these strategies in ways that might be helpful for studies of the female spectator. Particularly in their psychoanalytic incarnations, these have been notoriously pessimistic, questioning even the possibility of the female subject and feminine agency. The female spectator – in the influential and much cited works of Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane and others – is seen as trapped in her own image, too close to the text, unable to desire, permanently flattened out as objectified image who cannot share the position of the gaze.⁶⁶ Feminine visual literacy is written out of this script – along with feminine history and culture. These theories also participate in a high modernist sense of loss, which, despite the value they place on cinema, ultimately blinds them to much of its materialist qualities and its associations. Schor's model recovers an important 'feminine' strategy based around surface, centred on a

particular, close relationship to the image, and foregrounds how it is precisely neither blinding nor devoid of desire. Instead, it offers one way to understand the very images and materialism upon which cinema – like most of (post)modern culture – is built. It also offers the position of feminine agency that the psychoanalytic theories foreclose.

Fashioning progressive femininity

The narrative stakes of *Our Mutual Girl* thus differed from those serials discussed by Singer. *Our Mutual Girl* rarely places its heroine in danger, and on those uncommon occasions that Margaret found herself in jeopardy, she encountered hazards quite unlike those typically faced by serial queens.⁶⁷ Unlike other such heroines, she was rarely captured and never suffered the incredible and spectacular bindings, entrapments and containments that foregrounded their physicality and athletic prowess.⁶⁸ Instead, she faced the more mundane hazards found in the rougher parts of a city. Her encounters with danger result more from a hybrid combination of tourism and philanthropy, as her desire to experience urban life led her into the city's more unsavoury areas. In episode 15, for instance, she explores, 'dilapidated looking, though thickly tenanted buildings . . . butcher shops which seemed to cater more to the wants of flies than to their human patrons, and . . . the inevitable saloons with their swinging doors, behind which doubtlessly scores of blood-curdling plots of gangsters, gunmen and the like are laid.'⁶⁹ Although Margaret might trespass into a dangerous place or encounter criminals at the end of some reels, the narrative does not primarily circulate around the possibility that she might not be able to fight her way out of harm.

Rather than having their antecedents in serial fiction, dime novels and cheap stage melodramas, the hazards Margaret faces are precisely those facing progressive society and, as such, are more contemporary and less sensational.⁷⁰ Eileen Bowser has described *Our Mutual Girl* as 'a curious mixture of fiction and reality somewhere between a newsreel and a serial',⁷¹ referring both to Margaret's regular encounters with famous and politically important figures, and the serial's frequent allusions to contemporary social issues. Many narratives focus on charitable works, social reform and express the significance of public life – issues that helped define progressivism, the era's dominant sociopolitical philosophy. This was hardly surprising for a serial based on a young girl's exploration of all aspects of public life, a premiss that itself owes much to progressive ideology. While she wears nice dresses and hangs out in all the best places with the most illustrious people, Margaret also helps younger and more impoverished girls, generally solving other

67 Singer, 'Female power in the serial-queen melodrama', pp. 91–9.

68 Ibid., pp. 91–93, 99–122.

69 "'Our Mutual Girl' and Walter Damrosch assist a deserving musician: Chapter 15', *Real Life*, vol. IV, no. 6 (25 April 1914), p. 12.

70 Singer, 'Female power in the serial-queen melodrama', pp. 104–22.

71 Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907–1915* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990), p. 185.

72 '“Our Mutual Girl” and Walter Damrosch assist a deserving musician', p. 12.

73 'Stories of the new photoplays', *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 6 (25 April 1914), p. 16.

74 *Our Mutual Girl* advertisement, *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 9 (16 May 1914), p. 3.

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 6 (25 April 1914), p. 12.

77 'Stories of the new photoplays', *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 25 (5 September 1914), p. 8; 'Our Mutual Girl is exonerated', *Reel Life*, vol. V, no. 5 (17 October 1914), p. 17.

people's problems by offering them money, helping them find jobs and education. For example, in episode 15 she enlists the help of Walter Damrosch, 'America's greatest conductor-composer' to help 'a pitiful looking girl, huddled in a doorway next to a saloon.'⁷² The girl is a talented musician, so Damrosch gives her a scholarship to the Institute of Musical Arts. In episode 16, Margaret meets a burglar, but rather than finding herself in peril, she has 'a frank heart-to-heart conversation with the burglar man'.⁷³

Through these encounters with real reformers and women professionals, *Our Mutual Girl* endorses such progressive ideals as charitable aid to the poor, greater public consciousness and giving women (usually educated and upper class) greater access to decision-making and public life. In episode 18, released on 18 May 1914, Margaret 'finds that the little girl whom she rescued from an East Side Dive is again in trouble. By securing the good influence of Dr. Katherine Bement Davis, New York's women commissioner of Corrections, and Inez Milholland Boissevain, the famous suffragist and woman lawyer, she has the girl released from Blackwell's Island which she visits.'⁷⁴ Here female power rights social and legal injustice, a common theme in *Our Mutual Girl*. The film simultaneously emphasizes the social stratifications that limit female participation in public life and public space. Although the city is still a potentially dangerous place for working-class girls, their middle-class and upper-class counterparts are seemingly equipped not only with the skills to navigate its inequities and threats, but also with the necessary financial means to participate in its pleasures. Fittingly, then, this serious narrative and visit to jail is followed by more urbane pleasures as 'Margaret also has time to see Mizzi Hajos and Charles Meakins in the musical comedy hit, "Sari"'.⁷⁵

Advertisements for this episode are illustrated with a still of Norma Phillips sitting beside Inez Milholland Boissevain at the latter's busy and cluttered desk. Like Phillips, Boissevain is young, attractive and feminine, her professional interests highlighted by her business-like surroundings and her absorption in work. The message is clear: professionals can be young and feminine, as competence and intellect are not inscribed upon the body. Consequently, professional, intellectual and public activity can coexist with an interest in pretty clothes. The serial offers other versions of the professional woman, suggesting the protean nature of her identity. Dr Katherine Davis, who is pictured with Margaret in *Reel Life* in April 1914, is an older, more traditional-looking professional woman with grey hair and spectacles.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, female entrepreneur, Rose O'Neill, creator of the popular Kewpie dolls featured in episode 35, released on 14 September 1914, and Fifth Avenue's internationally renowned female designer, Simcox, seen in October's chronicles, suggest the professional choices available to women.⁷⁷

Fashion is also associated with the progressive desire to improve

78 'Our Mutual Girl' and Walter Damrosch assist a deserving musician', p. 12.

79 'Our Mutual Girl adopts a baby', *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 25 (5 September 1914), p. 17.

80 'Our Mutual Girl keeps baby Lily', *Reel Life*, vol. V, no. 2 (26 September 1914) (emphasis in original).

81 Singer, 'Female power in the serial-queen melodrama', p. 100.

82 'Our Mutual Girl adopts a baby', p. 17 (emphasis mine).

public life, its attractions demonstrating how women might make themselves at home in the city, or, perhaps, find themselves a career – whether as a department store clerk or as an illustrious designer. In episode 15, Margaret ventures into the slums, her philanthropy motivated by her desire 'to liberate some deserving individual from its clutches; some poor wretch capable of appreciating the nicer things in life'.⁷⁸ The only role that overwhelms the lure of fashion is the traditional role of maternity, hinting at the conservative core at the heart of this vision of femininity. In episode 34 (released 7 September 1914, written by Carolyn Wells), Margaret discovers her maternal instincts. After shopping for new hats and gowns, she discovers a baby placed in the back of her waiting limousine. The child is old enough to give her name as 'baby Lily', but unable to explain how she got there. Aunt Knickerbocker, Margaret's rich guardian, opposes her desire to keep the child, so Lily and Margaret retreat to the countryside.⁷⁹ Margaret's determination to adopt continues into the next few episodes, where she fights to stop rich Mrs Rogers adopting Lily. Thoughts of motherhood broaden her horizons: as she notes, 'a baby is so much more fascinating than society', so much more fulfilling than 'oceans of pretty clothes'. Indeed, she nearly has to relinquish society and her pretty clothes when Aunt Knickerbocker forces her to choose life with her in New York or an unsupported existence with Lily in episode 37. Fortunately, another aunt, Abbie, steps in to fill the void, allowing her to reconcile her love for beautiful clothing, society and the child. In celebration, Margaret 'spun back to New York and put in a busy afternoon shopping for *Baby Lily*'.⁸⁰

While perhaps second to maternal pleasures, fashion ultimately triumphs in this somewhat contradictory discourse, representing Margaret's capacity to succeed against the odds. Fashion represents the culmination of feminine desire and success in *Our Mutual Girl*, indicating that Margaret's celebratory and compensatory shopping trips are not mere diversions but, instead, the major attraction. Although Ben Singer suggests that 'The fantasy of feminine glamour situated the woman as the passive centre of attention, the decorative and charming magnet of admiration',⁸¹ the appeal of *Our Mutual Girl*, its intersection of fashion, desire and Margaret's agency, suggests that 'glamour' was far from passive. This is reinforced in *Reel Life*'s description of episode 34: 'Possessed of an *abounding vitality* that had to express itself in action, Our Mutual Girl bent her mind on that most delightful course of all women, the pursuit of new clothes and hats. In her determination to select her apparel for the Fall season, Margaret was helped by Mrs. Knickerbocker.'⁸² Shopping is further transformed into education, as Aunt Knickerbocker tutors Margaret in the ways of high fashion before she establishes herself as a stylish woman. Unlike other fashion icons of the screen, Margaret is seen in the act of shopping,

selecting the clothes she will wear and bring to prominence. This emphasis on the process of self-creation enforces that the female body exists here for the female audience rather than the male gaze. Indeed, it is almost indecipherable to a male untutored in the art of looking at fashion and understanding its construction and value.

The self that Margaret produces for herself is explicitly American, making her an object lesson for all female audiences, many of whom would be first- and second-generation immigrants. This is in keeping with the era's emphasis on producing American subjects, and the cinema's investments in yoking itself to this ideological project and attracting a female audience – both helping it establish its own respectability. Fashion is harnessed into this cause, although its European ties are not entirely dismissed. While Margaret still visits 'Lord & Taylor's new shop and . . . viewed the latest fashionable frocks imported from Paris and London',⁸³ the serial as a whole advances America's claims to fashion above Europe's, positioning New York as the global centre of style. As one of the advertisements in *Variety* proclaimed, 'Up-to-the-minute fashion material – showing the newest styles on living models in the studios of the great New York dressmakers'.⁸⁴ Fashion and the cinema were both key sites for the formation of national identity as both addressed large heterogeneous publics, including groups of recent immigrants and more rural spectators. Fashion's reliance on individual self-expression and the cinema's capacity to interpellate spectators simultaneously as individuals and as a group share the dialectic between individuality and collectivity that also defines cinematic spectatorship and national identity.⁸⁵ *Our Mutual Girl* stresses the public nature of mass-produced fashion as an industry and as a public form of feminine expression, further associating it with the public sphere and the city. Like cinema, its survival depended upon the new forms of public femininity it helped create and which it extolled.

As her identity developed, Margaret started to stand for other US ideals, expounding the importance of her home nation. In *Reel Life*'s plot description for episode 12, she takes her aunt to task for not taking enough interest in their own land:

'Auntie', said Margaret one morning, 'do you know I've never seen any of the places in New York that people in the country talk about.' 'What do you mean, my dear', returned the good Mrs. Knickerbocker. 'I've certainly done my best to show you everything that is worth while.' 'I know', answered Margaret, 'you're just like the rest of the New Yorkers; you ignore the historical points of interest in your own city and yet when you go abroad, you can hardly wait to visit some ramshackle house where Lord Somebody-or-other gasped his last, or some foundation or

⁸³ 'Our Mutual Girl' and Walter Damrosch assist a deserving musician, p. 12.

⁸⁴ Advertisement, *Variety*, vol. 33, no. 10 (6 February 1914), p. 26.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Pam Cook's discussion of national identity in *Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), esp. pp. 36–8.

86 'Our Mutual Girl meets Commander Evans', narrative for episode 12, *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 3 (4 April 1914), p. 12.

87 *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 3 (4 April 1914), p. 40.

88 'The listener chatters', *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 6 (25 April 1914), p. 6.

89 Advertisement for *Our Mutual Girl Weekly*, *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 23 (22 August 1914), p. 30.

90 'Facts and figures and such', *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 17 (11 July 1914), p. 6.

91 Alternatively, exhibitors personalize the front, as favoured by Mrs George Krupa, wife of the manager of The Hippodrome in Lancaster, PA: 'This space could be divided so as to net ten dollars from advertising ... but we think it to our advantage to use the largest space for our program, as that seems to be an inducement to get it in the home where it should be, as it is such a delightfully, interesting magazine for the ladies. ... Expect in the future to increase our weekly order to 1000 copies.' 'House advertising without cost', *Reel Life*, vol. V, no. 2 (26 September 1914), p. 4.

bridge or tower where history for another nation than your own was made.'⁸⁶

Margaret's position as a role model was further secured through a series of promotions and tie-ins. A contest was announced in the 4 April 1914 issue of *Reel Life*, with a prize of '\$25 in gold' to be awarded to the person writing the best letter on the subject of 'How well do you know "Our Mutual Girl"?' Readers were asked to 'Tell us something you would do in the Pictures if you were in HER place'.⁸⁷ The winner, Gertrude Petty, a twenty-two-year-old Pittsburgh girl studying at the New York Library School, was considered such an 'interesting personality' that Mutual decided to train her as a scenario writer. While *Reel Life* commented on Petty's 'strikingly beautiful brunette' looks and their 'contrast to the blonde charms of "Our Mutual Girl"', her career interests were foregrounded, again yoking *Our Mutual Girl* to images of a public, progressive, career-oriented, American femininity.⁸⁸

The following week, Mutual announced a spin-off magazine, *Our Mutual Girl Weekly*, to be released on 25 May 1914, just before episode 19 hit the screens. Like the serial, the magazine was distributed free to exhibitors to give away to female patrons. *Our Mutual Girl Weekly* featured the current story of *Our Mutual Girl* illustrated in full colour, fashion columns, health and beauty hints, 'exclusive discussions helpful to the housewife and to the housewife's young daughter', and a coupon that could be exchanged for a free May Manton dress pattern.⁸⁹ It was only available to patrons of theatres carrying the Mutual programme, and could not be bought in stores. This investment allowed Mutual to cover more films in *Reel Life* as it started to release features, including its first Griffith films. Before the appearance of *Our Mutual Girl Weekly*, Mutual had advised exhibitors to give away *Reel Life* (suggested price five cents) to attract female viewers. Its trade column endorsed the work of George O. Monroe, an exhibitor from Omaha, Nebraska, who used 'Reel Life every Tuesday night in my theater as a souvenir for the ladies. I might state that the free distribution of *Reel Life* to the ladies has proven a business getter with me.'⁹⁰ Besides helping attract women to theatres, *Our Mutual Girl Weekly* also provided something extra for the exhibitor: cover space that could be sold to local advertisers.⁹¹

Our Mutual Girl Weekly emphasized the centrality of fashion to feminine culture while constructing cinema's attractions in similar terms. This helped produce a vision of spectatorship centred around 'personality' – feminine imitation and self-construction through cinema. While the magazine (like all fan magazines) capitalizes on the spectator's desire to extend filmic pleasures beyond the moment of reception, the gift of the dress pattern indicates a specific set of assumptions and practices that undermine the idea that spectatorship,

femininity and identification are necessarily passive. As Pam Cook notes, the practice of imitating a star's appearance instead complicates binary divisions:

[Charles Eckert's] description of the young woman piecing together a 'look' or identity which is a composite of different star images suggests that what is at work here is less a perfect identification than a play with identity itself. Rather than simply becoming a stooge of consumerism, the female spectator becomes a kind of performance artist, putting on and taking off different roles. Clearly, this does not mean that she escapes consumerism altogether. . . . But she is, at least, both victim and appropriator, object and subject, instrument and agent.⁹²

⁹² Cook, *Fashioning the Nation*, p. 47.

The May Manton dress patterns – described as 'The Dernier Cri in Paris Modes' – invited viewers to dress themselves in Margaret's image.⁹³ Viewers who could not necessarily afford high fashion could therefore craft their own gowns, based on these patterns adapted from images seen in *Our Mutual Girl* and described in detail in both *Our Mutual Girl Weekly* and *Reel Life*.

⁹³ Advertisement, *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 6 (25 April 1914), p. 32.

Although Mutual offered its female audiences a highly commodified image that took femininity and crafted it into a corporate marketing tool, it nonetheless appealed to female spectators. While surviving records do not document the extent of *Our Mutual Girl*'s popularity, the size of the orders placed for *Our Mutual Girl Weekly* indicate that the serial was certainly a hit with women. *Reel Life* observed that many exhibitors 'who had ordered hundreds, yes, thousands of copies "sight unseen" because, we think, the publication bore the quality stamp of Mutual . . . doubled and trebled their orders'.⁹⁴ Furthermore, an advertisement in the same issue reprinted a 'characteristic telegram' from an exhibitor requesting that his order of magazines be increased from 1,000 to 10,000 copies per week, while yet another advertisement from August 1914 observed that *Our Mutual Girl Weekly*'s 'circulation growth is a record in magazine publication'.⁹⁵ This popularity suggests that women could reclaim Mutual's markedly 'inauthentic' and self-serving images of femininity for themselves. While Mutual's efforts to feminize its product were clearly successful, the elaborate nature of its promotions makes one wonder why. Women were clearly important, with one estimate from March 1914 stating that women and children comprised 85% of the moving picture audience. Although *The Moving Picture World*'s F.R. Richardson ridiculed this figure as too high, he admitted that theatre audiences in downtown shopping districts were largely female, especially during the day. In the evening, though, he found an equal distribution across the sexes. While these findings suggest that women were more frequent moviegoers, men would still constitute a large part of the viewing public.

⁹⁴ 'The listener chatters', p. 6.

⁹⁵ Advertisement, *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 11 (30 May 1914), p. 31; advertisement, *Reel Life*, vol. IV, no. 23 (22 August 1914), p. 30.

⁹⁶ F.R. Richardson, 'Women and children', *The Moving Picture World*, vol. 19, no. 8 (21 February 1914), p. 962.

Richardson's ideas suggest another reason why Mutual might have adopted a feminine image. He believed that more women were loyal patrons of neighbourhood theatres than men, as they were more inclined to stay within a small area near home and less likely to visit business districts.⁹⁶ When *Our Mutual Girl* premiered, Mutual was still investing most of its money and attention in its short films, which, at the time, would constitute the mixed programmes favoured by the same smaller neighbourhood houses. These films were hard to advertise individually because they changed rapidly and formed only part of a longer bill, so it made some sense to invest in a figurehead serial like *Our Mutual Girl*, which would then, in turn, act as promotion for the entire programme.

This situation was complicated, however, by Mutual's own awareness that an exclusive focus on women was not productive, even if women did constitute an important audience in their own right. In November 1914, *Reel Life* reported the closing of the country's only theatre to concentrate exclusively on women:

An effort to establish a 'women-only' theater in Los Angeles has been found not to be a financial success. Early in August [1914] the Clune Amusement Company opened the Exclusive, a small four hundred seat house in the shopping district, after remodelling it completely inside and out, and announced that it would be devoted to women and children only. Men were admitted only when accompanied by women. The scheme was widely advertised and at first, there was a fair business.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ *Reel Life*, vol. V, no. 8 (7 November 1914), p. 6.

Although the opening of a women-only theatre corroborates the importance of female patronage, its closure (and the report in *Reel Life*) reveals Mutual's awareness of the problems of addressing films to just one gender. While its advertising emphasized the feminine nature of Mutual films, it is possible that this was designed to attract women to a programme that already had a strong male following through the likes of its Keystone and Punch comedies (with their combination of slapstick and pin-up girls) and its Broncho and Flying 'A' Westerns.

Yet Mutual's specific articulation of femininity as inseparable from fashion, urban style and consumption is also instructive inasmuch as it showcased cinema's ability to represent clothing and shopping in more detail than any other medium. In adopting fashion as the centre of their new promotional serial, then, it seems that Mutual also used *Our Mutual Girl* to make a statement about gendered spectatorship. Rather than being blinded by her 'hyperbolically intimate relationship to the screen' and thus rendered passive, the feminine spectator's non-linear forms of reading centred around the detail offer, perhaps, the archaeology of another form of literacy that is fundamental to Hollywood narrative cinema – the use of mise-en-scene as an important signifying mechanism.⁹⁸ Rather than writing women out of

⁹⁸ This description of the female spectator is drawn from Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, p. 1.

the history of narrative forms and seeing them as pawns of patriarchal culture or industrial greed, we might examine the roles feminine culture has historically played in configuring narrative and representational strategies as well as the contextual environments that guide cinematic understanding for both genders.

Uncle Tom, Goldilocks and the Rough Riders: early cinema's encounter with empire

KRISTEN WHISSEL

¹ See especially, Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz (eds), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

Recent criticism has theorized and historicized the early cinema's complex relation to technological modernity and its transformation of everyday experience and perception.¹ Thus the moving pictures have been placed alongside shifts such as the growth of industrial capitalism; urbanization and mechanization; an increase in international traffic aided by new technologies of transportation and communication (such as the railway, the steamship, the telephone and telegraph); the concomitant collapsing of distances and reconfiguration of time; and an acceleration of the urban, national and international circulation of bodies and commodities. The cinema responded and contributed to these changes through its proliferation and circulation of mechanically reproduced moving images that endowed spectators with (imaginary) mobility and extended perception, reorganized the experience of distance, space and time, all the while feeding into burgeoning commercial culture. The rise of US overseas imperialism marks an unmistakable point of convergence between modernity's circulatory patterns and early cinematic forms of representation. Not only did the Spanish–American war coincide with the rise of the moving pictures, it is also inseparable from the American experience of modernity. Focusing on a range of actualities, re-enactments and story films, this essay will argue that the moving pictures provided a framework ideally suited for inscribing the Spanish–American war as a series of traumatic shocks and surprises, and for articulating contradictory yet

characteristically modern responses to such incursions. It will posit some of the ideological effects of early cinema's encounter with empire, in particular its construction of a sense of national identity and imperial purpose for curious spectators.

Tom Gunning's theorization of the presentational mode and cultural origins of the 'cinema of attractions' provides a crucial starting point for an analysis of the relation between early cinema and empire. Gunning argues that in contrast to the narrative fiction film's construction of voyeuristic spectatorship, films made before 1907 construct a spectator-film relation that is definitively exhibitionist, in which

theatrical display dominates over narrative absorption, emphasizing the direct stimulation of shock or surprise at the expense of unfolding a story or creating a diegetic universe. . . . Making use of both fictional and non-fictional attractions, its energy moves outwards towards an acknowledged spectator rather than inwards towards the character-based situations essential to classical narrative.²

The cinema of attractions constructs viewing experiences based on shocking or surprising visual impact which, Gunning argues, 'relate more to the attractions of the fairgrounds than the tradition of the legitimate theatre. The relation between films and the emergence of the great amusement parks, such as Coney Island, at the turn of the century provides rich grounds for rethinking the roots of early cinema.'³ Revisiting the moving pictures' status as an attraction at a particular type of fairground – the World's Fairs and Expositions in the USA – brings the relation between early cinema and empire into clearer focus.

Robert Rydell has shown how the Midway entertainments that reached the height of their popularity in early twentieth-century US culture were primary sites where scientific racism, national-imperial ideology and the visual pleasures of mass culture merged. Through a combination of anthropological spectacles, technological displays and 'exotic' Midway exhibits (such as models of Philippine villages), the World's Fairs sought to articulate and legitimate a world view which ranked various nations, cultures and races in a hierarchy of civilization.⁴ The cinema's projected images were among the attractions that brought into relief dividing lines between the categories of civilized and primitive, colonizer and colonized, that the Fairs sought to legitimate and naturalize. Charles Musser notes that, 'the first instance of modern commercial cinema – projected moving images using an intermittent mechanism – in the United States'⁵ took place with the exhibition of the Armat-Jenkins Phantascope at the 1895 Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta. Interestingly, this exhibit was adjacent to 'The Old Plantation Show'⁶ – an arrangement which no doubt helped sustain an idea of the nation's progress by

2 Tom Gunning 'The cinema of attractions: early film, its spectator and the avant-garde', in Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), p. 59.

3 Ibid., p. 58.

4 Robert Rydell *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

5 Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: the American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), p. 103.

6 Ibid., p. 104.

7 For an excellent analysis of the relation between cinematic representation, scientific racism and early ethnographic films taken at the World's Fairs, see Fatima Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

8 Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, p. 226.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 225.

10 For an analysis of the effects of technological breakdown on the modern individual, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: the Industrialization of Space and Time in the 19th Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977). For analyses of representations of mechanical breakdown in early cinema and its link to developments in spectatorship and developments in film form, see Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: the Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), and Tom Gunning, 'Heard over the phone: the de Lorde tradition of the terrors of technology', *Screen*, vol. 32, no. 2 (1991), pp.184-96.

juxtaposing exhibits of new (moving picture) technologies alongside exhibits that provided a nostalgic, mythological and racist spectacle of the nation's 'pre-technological' ante-bellum past (one which undoubtedly linked African-Americans to a pre-technological way of life). While the technology of moving pictures acted as a modern attraction within a broader exhibitionary logic that linked new technologies to national progress, the presence of the technology of the cinema supported such distinctions by materializing a more general division articulated at the Fairs between those who possess technology and those who do not,⁷ and between the nation's pre-technological past and its present technological sophistication.

Of course, the cinema's participation in emergent imperialist constructions of the nation went beyond the exhibitionary confines of the World's Fairs. In his influential history of the early US cinema, Musser notes that in the months immediately preceding the Spanish-American War, audience attendance at the moving picture shows had plummeted and the business of motion picture exhibition had become a losing venture. Fortuitously,

the industry bounced back in early 1898 as events leading up to the Spanish-American War revived interest in moving pictures. Indeed, warfare not only provided American producers with their key subject matter but served as an apt metaphor for commercial competition within the industry itself. Both conflicts involved issues of markets and dominance of their respective realms. . . . The Spanish-American War created such a demand for films that other producers soon appeared.⁸

The colonial apparatus and the cinematic apparatus found common ground in the marketplace, as the Spanish-American war made a new supply of jingoistic images available to US producers whose films provoked a much-needed surge in spectatorial interest. While Musser links this demand for cinematic images of the war to the moving pictures' ability to act as a 'visual newspaper',⁹ I would argue that the kinds of images made available by the war intensified the formal features and visual pleasures of the cinema of attractions, making film a particularly effective form for inscribing and consuming images of empire.

On 15 February 1898, a mysterious explosion sank the battleship 'Maine' in Havana Harbour, thus marking the inception of US overseas expansion with an extraordinary example of modern transportation technology's capacity for catastrophic breakdown.¹⁰ The early cinema's promotion of shock and surprise, its emphasis on spectacle and its reorganization of space and time, provided a tailor-made form for representing this technologically sophisticated military struggle for overseas colonies and global expansion. Indeed, as the US invaded and then occupied overseas territories, films offered exciting spectacles of battleships leaving port and soldiers training

11 Tom Gunning, 'An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in)credulous spectator', *Art and Text*, no. 34 (1989), p. 36.

12 For an example of this aesthetic, see, in particular, actualities such as *President Roosevelt and the Rough Riders* (American Mutoscope and Biograph, 1898) and *Roosevelt's Rough Riders* (American Mutoscope and Biograph, 1898).

13 Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 22.

14 These include films such as *Wreck of the Battleship Maine* (Edison, 1898), and *Divers at Work on the Wreck of the Maine* (Biograph, 1898).

15 Gunning, 'An aesthetic of astonishment', p. 39.

16 Roland Barthes, 'The rhetoric of the image' in *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 33–51.

17 Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, p. 241. According to Musser, the International Film Co. also produced a phantom image of the 'Maine' by photographing a sister ship and passing it off as the 'Maine' as it appeared prior to its destruction. *Ibid.*, p. 247.

for the conflict – images that seem to trade upon what Gunning calls an 'aesthetic of astonishment' based on 'the excitement of curiosity and its fulfilment. Through a variety of formal means, the images of the cinema rush forward to meet their viewer.'¹¹ Gunning's phrasing immediately calls to mind films of Rough Riders galloping towards the camera¹² and battleships cruising out to sea. These are, in fact, imperial counterparts to the images of speeding locomotives on which Gunning focuses. At the formal level, images of imperial agents and the military apparatus undoubtedly thrilled 'patriotic' audiences by rushing towards them from the screen; at the level of exhibition, the mechanically reproduced actualities and reconstituted newsreels satisfied curiosity about the war by removing the Rough Riders from their otherwise inaccessible locations in time and space. Thus, by placing a 'copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself', the moving pictures enabled 'the original to meet the beholder halfway'¹³ in vaudeville houses and storefronts. In short, such images trade upon both the moving pictures' ability to harness the visually kinetic mobilizations of imperial expansion and, moreover, its ability to redirect inwardly the outward thrust of imperial expansion by circulating images of US soldiers, naval parades, and re-enactments of battles throughout the nation.

Some of the earliest and most popular images of the war were films of the sunken 'Maine' battleship, which promote a perception of the war as a violent shock visited upon the US (and not Cuba and the Philippines).¹⁴ Images of the ship blown apart and sunk in Havana Harbour offer a viewing pleasure based on the satisfaction of a visual curiosity which 'draws the viewer towards unbeautiful sights such as a mangled corpse'¹⁵ – in this case the wreckage of the US military apparatus, a traumatic image that would provide an alibi for the USA's conquest of Spain's overseas territories. Ensuing films express a range of modern responses to the explosion, many of which foreground the moving pictures' ability to exploit the formal features of the cinema and the cultural functions of its photographic base. While the re-enactment, *The Burial of the 'Maine' Victims* (Edison Co., 1898), takes advantage of the elegiac capacity of the photograph and its power to preserve in time an image of the dead that might be circulated for the purposes of national mourning, other Spanish–American war films took advantage of what Roland Barthes calls the susceptibility of the photograph to connotative procedures.¹⁶ Biograph resurrected an image of the 'Maine' prior to its destruction by re-titling a film of *Battleships 'Iowa' and 'Massachusetts'* as *Battleships 'Maine' and 'Iowa'*.¹⁷ Both the denotative capacity of the film's photographic base and the power of the title to implant the image with new connotative meaning allowed Biograph to restore integrity, power and wholeness, if not to the 'Maine' itself then at least to its phantom image, thereby making the destroyed ship

18 Musser quotes a report in *New York World* (24 February 1898) on audience response to the film in Chicago: 'there were fifteen minutes of terrific shouting when the battleships 'Maine' and 'Iowa' were shown in the biograph manoeuvring off Fortress Monroe. The audience arose, cheered and cheered again, and the climax was reached when a picture of Uncle Sam under the flag was thrown on the canvas' Musser, *Emergence of Cinema*, p. 241

19 David Levy, 'Reconstituted newsreels, reenactments and the American narrative film', in Roger Holman (ed.), *Cinema 1900/1906: an Analytical Study* (IAF, 1982), p. 250



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

20 Schivelbusch places particular emphasis on the mode of perception manufactured by mechanized forms of transport: 'Panoramic perception, in contrast to traditional perception, no longer belonged to the same space as the perceived objects: the traveler saw the objects, landscapes, etc. through the apparatus which moved him through the world. That machine and the motion it created became integrated into his visual perception: thus he could only see things in motion' Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, p. 64

21 Gunning 'The cinema of attractions' p. 59

available for a triumphant elegiac celebration that bypassed confrontation with an image of its catastrophic destruction.¹⁸ The cinematic resurrection of the 'Maine' by means of retitling foregrounds one impulse of imperial ideology satisfied by moving images of the war: to make good the national loss, fragmentation and trauma of military conflict by translating it into an image of restored wholeness, military mastery and power.

The relation of military power to the pleasures of filmgoing is made plain by such actualities as *Admiral Dewey Receiving the Washington and New York Committees* (Edison Co., 1899), and *Admiral Dewey Taking Leave of Washington Committee on US Cruiser 'Olympia'* (Edison Co., 1899) (Figure 1). In these films, the camera records the committees embarking and disembarking from a position on deck. Such films exploit what David Levy calls 'drama of the cameraman's presence'¹⁹ in order to give the spectator an imaginary proximity to significant events taking place during this particular phase of US expansion. Shot from the stern of a cruiser as the flag is being raised, *Morning Colors on the US Cruiser 'Raleigh'* (Edison Co., 1899) demonstrates how, in the process of creating such proximity, the camera might also align the spectator's vision with a pro-imperial point of view, and both of these, in turn, with the 'patriotism' symbolized by the flag (Figure 2). Other films featuring images of battleships play upon the expansionist desire implicit in the 'panoramic perception' afforded by films shot from transportation technologies. For example, *The US Battleship 'Oregon'* (AM&B, 1898) exhibits a thrilling spectacle of a US battleship whose own movement is reflected in the movement of the camera as it is pulled through the water by the unseen ship from which the film was shot. Thus, at the same time as this film displays a powerful image of a battleship, the placement of the camera on board a moving ship also allows audiences to imagine what it might be like to see through the same military technology that propelled the US imperial apparatus through the world.²⁰ Here the tendency of the early cinematic apparatus to direct its energy 'outwards towards an acknowledged spectator'²¹ intersects with the outward thrust of the colonial apparatus and endows audiences with an imperially inflected panoramic perception.

We might speculate that the particular thrill offered to 'patriotic' Americans by such images derived from the alignment of the subject of perception with imperial power. Yet, the pleasure of such an alignment would depend upon the exhibition of a narrow range of images which helped mask the routine brutality of imperialism. For example, films such as *Morro Castle, Havana Harbour* (Edison Co., 1898) and *General Lee's Procession, Havana* (Edison Co., 1899) allowed spectators to possess and occupy at an imaginary level spaces that the USA occupied at the level of military reality. Just as the 'foreign view' film allowed audiences to see the world without

- 22 Ann Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), p. 37



Fig. 3

- 23 My reading of this film is influenced by Amy Kaplan's analysis of *An American Soldier in Love and War* 'The Birth of an Empire', MLA Conference, San Francisco, 1998, published in *PMLA*, vol. 114 no. 5 (1999)

- 24 Gunning, 'The cinema of attractions', pp. 59–60

physically undertaking the toils of travel, films of conquered territories allowed audiences visually to consume the beauty of the colonies without having to witness the routine violence of colonial domination – images that would turn thrill into horror. Thus the pleasures of the imperially inflected panoramic perception provided by these films depended in part upon 'the immobility of the spectator, a stasis rewarded by the imaginary mobilities that such fixity provided'.²² This purely imaginary mobility ensured the separation of the space of exhibition from the space of colonization, a gap that would allow for the production of mythological meanings about such spaces (for example, the colonies are beautiful, primitive, in need of civilization, and so on) that might strengthen the nation's imperial resolve.

Other re-enactments and story films filter imperialism through mini-narratives that inscribe the US experience of the war through scenarios that convert fragmentation and loss into wholeness and triumph. For example, *Love and War* (Edison Co., 1898) begins with the dispersal of the patriarchal nuclear family as a soldier takes leave of his family. The second and third tableaux follow the soldier into battle where he is wounded, and then into a field hospital. The fourth tableau converts the preceding images of family fragmentation and bodily trauma into a restored unity and victorious gain as news of the US victory is brought to the family moments before the soldier returns home. In this final tableau, family unity acts as a metaphor for national unity and victory as all celebrate together (Figure 3). The narrative structure of *Love and War* inscribes the violence visited upon Cuba and the Philippines by US forces as shock, trauma and loss experienced and then overcome by the US family-as-nation.²³ This tendency to filter the war through reassuring narratives was sustained by postwar variety programmes which, according to Musser, featured an assembly of Spanish-American war actualities, acted films and lantern slides arranged into a 'panorama of the war' that began with 'the arrival of the soldiers at Tampa' and included 'important movements that followed up to the surrender of Santiago'.²⁴ The point is not so much that such programmes transformed history into spectacle, but that the pleasure created by such spectacles derived in part from their re-organization into a sequence that culminated with a display of the mastery and power of US imperialism.

Early cinema's developing formal features made it particularly well suited to frame the war through spectacles of shock, surprise and trauma recuperated as documents of national unity and imperial resolve. While the first images of the conflict represented it as shocking and surprising instances of technological destruction, ensuing films converted the traumatic impact of such images by aligning the subject of perception with mobilized technologies of imperial power – a shift from tragedy to triumph narrated shortly

thereafter by the emergent story film. While actualities of the war promoted a sense of the inevitability of US overseas expansion, the story film accommodated shifting discourses on race and nation that followed the USA's transformation from nation to empire.

The imperialist nostalgia of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

In his essay 'Imperialist nostalgia', Renato Rosaldo examines various discourses coming out of the American colonial experience in the Philippines. Focusing primarily on memoirs and documents written by government agents, missionaries and ethnographers, Rosaldo charts American perceptions of the social and cultural changes that colonialism imposed on indigenous cultures. He identifies a particular trope whereby the author recalls what a particular culture was like just prior to colonialism's modernizing transformations and laments the very change that he/she participated in bringing about. Rosaldo calls this paradoxical form of longing 'imperialist nostalgia' and explains that it

occurs alongside a peculiar sense of mission, the white man's burden, where civilized nations stand duty-bound to uplift so-called savage ones. In this ideologically constructed world of ongoing progressive change, putatively static savage societies become a stable reference point for defining (the felicitous progress of) civilized identity. 'We' valorize innovation and then yearn for more stable worlds, whether these reside in our own past, in other cultures, or in the conflation of the two. Imperialist nostalgia allows the colonial agent to mourn the loss of a culture which one has destroyed from a position of innocence – longing for what has been destroyed overlays culpability with the 'generally benign nature of all nostalgia'²⁵.

²⁵ Renato Rosaldo, 'Imperialist nostalgia', *Representations*, vol. 26 (1989), p.108.

Relevant to early cinema's encounter with empire is Rosaldo's argument that modern imperialism's drive for 'ongoing progressive change' provokes an impulse to look back in time for a more stable world that seems to precede the tumultuous change of contemporary society. Irretrievably lost to the past, these nostalgic formations are referenced through narratives that articulate a longing either for another culture's more 'primitive' way of life (prior to its transformation by colonialism) or for a simpler way of life located in the nation's own past. In the process, these narrative accounts place the imperial agent in a position of innocence which absolves him from culpability for the processes and effects of colonial domination. Rosaldo notes that 'In any of its versions imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of "innocent yearning" both to capture people's imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination'.²⁶ Although the film does not directly reference the Spanish-American

²⁶ Ibid.

War, the Edison Company's *Uncle Tom's Cabin; Or Slavery Days* (Edwin Porter, 1903) stands out as a primary example of cinematic imperialist nostalgia. Specifically, this film exhibits a nostalgic spectacle of the ante-bellum South as a simpler moment in the nation's cultural and historical 'past'. As I will show, the predominantly nostalgic mode of this film renders innocent US imperialism's exploitative domination of racial others abroad by conjuring up ostensibly 'benign' instances of such domination from the nation's past – which, the film assures its viewers, resulted in national strength and unity at home and the heavenly redemption of murdered racial others in heaven.

Uncle Tom's Cabin; Or, Slavery Days presents us with a curious example of the cinema of attractions' tendency to privilege spectacle over narrative: the ten-minute film condenses Harriet Beecher Stowe's roughly five-hundred-and fifty-page novel into fourteen tableaux, a translation that radically transforms the novel's racial politics. Anyone familiar with Stowe's novel will recall the lengthy and detailed descriptions of every household in which the many subplots take place. For Stowe, these domestic settings are the outward signs of what resides in their owners' hearts. Any scene set in a public space, such as a slave auction or a steamboat, inevitably finds its way back to a lost domestic existence through a character's narration of black domesticity's violent dissolution by the exchange relations of slavery. The manifest exteriority of the cinema of attraction's exhibitionism is incompatible with this focus on domestic and subjective interiority. The 1903 film adaptation therefore expropriates the story from the domestic sphere and instead elaborates it primarily through the outdoor and public spaces in which the exchange relations of slavery were dominant – the plantation, the auction, the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Reproducing these scenes within a diminutive mise-en-scene of painted backdrops, highly artificial costuming, and precisely choreographed actions and performances, this vision of the Old South brings about a political reversal: rather than vilify slavery, the film produces a nostalgic spectacle of the ante-bellum South mapped onto a lost social landscape that mythologizes a way of life that depended upon the subordination and exploitation of blacks.

It becomes easier to contextualize historically the imperialist nostalgia informing the film's substitutions and reductions by first examining a late nineteenth-century theatrical adaptation of the novel. While Stowe's text is structured by the contradictory racial politics of her Abolitionism,²⁷ the Reconstruction-era stage version by Charles Townsend (which seems to be derived in part from an earlier adaptation by George Aiken) is structured by the racial codings of Jim Crow and a Reconstruction-era anxiety over miscegenation. For example, in Stowe's version, the 'wicked' slave girl Topsy is slowly reformed by her white counterpart, Eva, and by the teachings of her

27 See Nancy Armstrong, 'Why daughters die: the racial logic of American sentimentalism', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1994).

white adoptive mother, Aunt Ophelia. Unable to imagine the USA including freed slaves as citizens, Stowe ultimately exiles Topsy to life as a missionary in Africa. In Townsend's stage version, however, Topsy and Ophelia become an interracial couple who provoke jokes about miscegenation. Townsend triangulates the mother-daughter pair with a new character, Deacon Perry. Just as Deacon Perry is about to propose to Ophelia, Topsy runs on stage:

Top. Miss Feely, here is some flowers dat I hab been gathering for you. (*gives bouquet*).

Oph. That's a good child.

Dea. Miss Ophelia, who is this young person?

Oph. She is my daughter.

Dea. (*aside*) Her daughter! Then she must have married a colored man. I was not aware that you had been married Miss Ophelia?

Oph. Married! Sakes alive! what made you think I had been married?

Dea. Good gracious! I'm getting confused. Didn't I understand you to say that this – somewhat tanned – young lady was your daughter?

Oph. Only by adoption. She is my adopted daughter.

Dea. O–oh! (*aside*) I breathe again.

Top. By golly! dat old man's eyes stick out of 'um head dre'ful. Guess he never seed anything like me 'afore.²⁸

²⁸ Charles Townsend, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: a Melodrama in Five Acts* (New York: Wehman Bros, 1889), p. 31.

Written fourteen years before Porter's film was made, this excerpt from Townsend's play helps to foreground the textual and historical distance between the novel and Porter's film, and reminds us that two wars – the Civil War and the Spanish-American War – separate the production of the three different generic incarnations cited here. Just as late nineteenth-century theatrical stagings of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* such as Townsend's brought the text closer to an exhibitionary mode of representation, the above racist joke plays on the prohibition against interracial marriage by turning miscegenation into a 'shocking' spectacle. By the early twentieth century, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had undergone a long history of subtractions and substitutions in its various adaptations as magic lantern shows, board games, songs and story books. Indeed, it seems to have served as a flexible framework of characters, icons and narrative conflicts that could accommodate and articulate transformations in racial and national politics in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century US culture. For example, Janet Staiger notes that, 'By the 1890s some productions "ended not with Uncle Tom approaching the gates of heaven but with Union armies triumphing over the Confederates". A tableau showed Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation, and during the Spanish-American War, the entry of "men in blue" carrying the American flag while singing a patriotic song would be a final, rousing crowd pleaser.'²⁹ The subtractions required to translate

²⁹ Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 108.

Stowe's long novel into variously truncated exhibitionary forms and genres seem to have created gaps that allowed for the re-inflection of its racial politics according to contemporary ideological demands – including imperial culture's imperative to produce nostalgic constructions of the nation's past.

This past is referred to in the film's full title, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; Or, Slavery Days*, which significantly revises Stowe's subtitle, *Or, Life Among the Lowly*, and suggests from the start that the film represents a nostalgic version of the USA's past 'racial history'. Rather than identify slavery as an overthrown exploitative institution, the title describes it as a brief moment in time, only 'days' long and lost to the past – like 'the good old days'. Noël Burch offers compelling insight into how the film's form supports the nostalgia signified by the its full title:

the audience, knowing the story already, ultimately did not come to discover its twists and turns, but to look at the pictures, to enjoy the concatenation of a series of spectacularly represented archetypes – to browse through an album of sumptuous photographs illustrating a text which was to be found elsewhere: it came to participate in a ritual of confirmation.³⁰

Indeed, the film displays narratively significant moments of the story which are well suited to spectacular display, such as Eliza's escape, St Clair's purchase of Tom, and the deaths of Eva, Tom and St Clair. Many of the tableaux end with the characters striking a frontal pose in which the action climaxes with a kind of photographic display.³¹ In this way, visual exhibition predominates over narrative as a series of 'sumptuous' images represent a fictional vision of 'slavery days' referenced through familiar characters and highly charged narrative moments. Thus the 'elsewhere' referred to by the film is not simply the text's novelistic or theatrical manifestations, but a vague mythological moment that the film's photo-album structure makes available for mass contemplation and 'innocent yearning'.

Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the temporal structure of the photo album suggests possible further effects of the film's structure. Bourdieu argues that the photo album produces a sense of present social unity through its distilled photographic representation of its past:

The images of the past arranged in chronological order, the logical order of social memory, evoke and communicate the memory of events which deserve to be preserved because the group sees a factor of unification in the monuments of its past unity, or – it draws its present unity from its past . . . all the unique experiences that give the individual memory the particularity of a secret are banished from it, and the common past, or, perhaps, the highest

30 Noël Burch, 'Porter, or ambivalence', *Screen*, vol. 19, no. 4 (1978), p. 97.

31 For a history of the frontal pose in theatre and cinema, see Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

32 Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: a Middlebrow Art*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 30–31.

33 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 23.

common denominator of the past, has all the clarity of a faithfully visited gravestone.³²

In the process of selecting, rearranging and communicating narrative events ‘which deserve to be preserved’, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* acted as a cinematic photo album that offered its spectator a glimpse at a shared cultural past which masquerades as the nation’s historical past. Put differently, the Porter film presents well-known narrative events of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as ‘monuments of [the nation’s] past unity’ from which to shore up a sense of present unity and historical continuity. That the film uses a fictional narrative as a reference point for the nation’s past is central to its nostalgic mode, for as Susan Stewart notes, the ideological effect of nostalgia lies in its tendency to be ‘hostile to history and its invisible origins’, for ‘the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative. . .’³³ At this point it becomes possible to expand Gunning’s characterization of the cinema of attractions: while this film selects and displays scenes from the novel that are ideally suited to the production of visual impact on the spectator, the primary objective of such impact is not disruption and shock, but nostalgic longing for a time prior to the tumult of modernity and empire.

There is a historical explanation, I think, for this nostalgia, one that allows us to understand *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as a film that conflates the nation’s cultural and historical past in order to construct continuity between the fictional past the film constructs and the contemporary context in which it was projected. The film momentarily transported its contemporary audience to a time in US history when millions of blacks had the status of commodities rather than citizens. One of the myths surrounding Stowe’s novel is that it initiated the downfall of slavery. It thus occupied an ambivalent position in US culture well suited to the politics of nostalgia: that of a contradictorily racist abolitionist text which legend claims ended the very social formation it seems to preserve and sentimentalize. That the cinema would choose to return to such a text in 1903 is not surprising, for the imperial project forced a number of shifts in the nation’s ability to define itself through an oppositional relationship to racial others. The conscription of African-Americans in the imperial conflict (documented by actualities such as *Colored Troops Disembarking* [Edison Co., 1898]) gave black Americans new legitimacy within the national-imperial apparatus. Meanwhile the war itself failed to produce a clear division between colonizer and colonized, self and other, as the annexation of overseas territories threatened to unite these binary pairs within the same national formation. Throughout and following the war, pro- and anti-imperial sentiment divided a nation still fragmented by the political divisions of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Meanwhile, pro-imperialists based their argument for an ongoing military presence in former

- 34 For examples of such discourse, see Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1990), p. 306. See also Robert Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire: the Anti-Imperialists 1898–1900* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968). For an excellent analysis of fictional and journalist revisions of the roles played by black American soldiers in the war, see Amy Kaplan, 'Black and Blue on San Juan Hill', in *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 219–36.
- 35 Goran Rystad, 'The constitution and the flag', in Serge Ricard and Hélène Christol (eds.), *Anglo-Saxonism in US Foreign Policy: The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1899–1919* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1991), p. 11.

Spanish colonies on the claim that the USA had a ‘Christian’, ‘patriotic’, and ‘paternalistic’ duty to rescue the ‘racially inferior’ or ‘primitive’ inhabitants of the island territories from their ostensible barbarity³⁴ – a claim that echoed pro-slavery arguments made in the previous century. Eventually, a series of cases popularly known as the ‘Insular Cases’ came before the Supreme Court to decide the legal, social and economic status of the Philippines. *Downes v. Bidwell*³⁵ answered the question of whether or not the Constitution followed the flag, and thus whether or not (ultimately not) Filipinos were considered part of the national body while under US military rule. Rather than simply solidifying and uniting the nation (as the initial ‘patriotic’ responses to the war might do) overseas imperialism complicated constructions of national-racial identity, thereby requiring American culture to manufacture stories about the nation’s racial identity and what that identity gave it licence to do.

Perhaps the most striking detail of the film's opening tableau is the representation of Uncle Tom's character. Played by a white actor in blackface, this version of Uncle Tom is radically dissimilar to the character valued in Stowe's novel precisely for his physical power. While he is tall and heavy-set, what little hair covers Uncle Tom's head is white, and he appears to be twenty years older than Stowe's character.³⁶ Symptomatic of the early cinema's ability to harness the visible, the ageing of Uncle Tom externalizes the interior qualities for which this figure was valued within the dominant culture – docility, faithfulness and endurance – and turns them into the radically legible features of an icon.

37 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1991) p. 21.

38 Ann Douglas uses the phrase 'the exaltation of the average' to describe Stowe's treatment of Little Eva, a characteristic which she argues is a 'trademark of mass culture'. Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, Alfred Knopf, 1977), p. 4.

39 Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs note, in *Theatre to Cinema*, p. 41, that an 1888 stage production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* represented the race between the 'Natchez' and the 'Robert E. Lee'.

48 See Norbury L. Wayman's *Life on the River: a Pictorial History of the Mississippi, the Missouri and the Western River System* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971).

finally, when he dies. This gesture of appeal and defeat 'is not a conventional sign', as Roland Barthes would say, but is 'abandoned as soon as it is understood; it is not an outcome, but quite the contrary, it is a duration, a display, it takes up the ancient myths of public Suffering and Humiliation: the cross and the pillory'.³⁷ One could say, then, that Uncle Tom's appearance and gesture continually refer to his ultimate demise, a narrative event that late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century culture repeated over and over again. With this in mind, we can return to the artificiality of Tom's blackface, which reveals a desire or wish for something that no longer exists on the part of a dominant culture that was, at best, ambivalent about exploitation based on racial difference. Blackface in this film permits the 'exaltation of the exploited'³⁸ in the representative figure of Uncle Tom, yet without disallowing a general cultural indifference towards the systematic exploitation of, say, blacks or Filipinos.

The opening tableau establishes Tom and Eliza as very different embodiments of racial difference. If Uncle Tom's blackface acts as sign of his idealization, then Eliza's paleness signifies her status as a mulatta who can pass for a white woman, an apparently troubling image of racial difference pursued over space and time, who neither escapes nor is caught. The tableaux representing Eliza's story invoke, and then depart from, the conventions of the early chase film, in which a clearly established provocation by a character is followed by an extended pursuit and a resolution which shows the antagonist being punished. While a title indicates that Eliza is a runaway slave, the chase ultimately remains unresolved and deviates from convention when it leaves her, her son and her husband George trapped on a ledge exchanging gun-fire with the traders.

Rather than finish the narrative strand of Eliza's story, the film presents a studio reproduction of a famous race between two Mississippi steamboats, the 'Robert E. Lee' and the 'Natchez'. 'The Race Between the "Natchez" and the "Robert E. Lee"' does not represent any part of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but is an addition that conflates two separate historical events.³⁹ The tableau begins with a studio reproduction of a famous 1870 race on the Mississippi River between the two rival steamboats and ends with one of the ships catching fire and sinking during a storm. Although the film represents the race and the fire as a single event, neither boat sank in 1870. Rather, on 30 September 1882, the 'Robert E. Lee II' caught fire and sank, killing twenty-one of the passengers and crew on board.⁴⁰ The incorporation of the race between the 'Natchez' and the 'Robert E. Lee', and the sinking of the 'Robert E. Lee II', pulls the film out of the temporal scope of 'slavery days'; yet, given the film's nostalgic reconstruction of the nation's past, the spectacles exhibited within this tableau are wholly within the scope of its re-presentation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a racial history of the USA. The film

disavows the apparently troubling story of the mulatto family's flight to freedom by replacing it with a mournful display of a post-'slavery days' tragedy – for the film calls forth the past glory of the 'Robert E. Lee' only to shroud it in a reminder of the tragic fate of its descendant, the 'Robert E. Lee II'. The referential heterogeneity of these tableaux and the narrative and temporal discontinuity resulting from their sequential ordering has the effect of linking the incorporation of blacks into dominant culture (represented by Eliza's escape on one hand, and the ensuing allusion to Reconstruction on the other) to the tragic demise of the Old South. In turn, the referencing of the Reconstruction era as tragic intensifies the nostalgic impact of the film's representation of 'slavery days'.

Significantly, a painted backdrop of the 'Robert E. Lee' provides the setting for the next tableau, which returns to the fiction of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Like the earlier cinematic resurrection of the sunken 'Maine', the return of the 'Robert E. Lee' has the effect of restoring imaginary wholeness and life to a destroyed icon of the nation's past. It is not surprising, then, that 'Tom Rescues Eva' opens with a visibly happier image of 'slavery days': this and the two other tableaux, 'Tom and Eva in the Garden' and 'The Auction Sale of St. Clair's Slaves', begin with dance numbers performed by slave couples. Along with the film's representation of Uncle Tom and Topsy, these dance routines contribute to the benign appearance of 'slavery days' and thus the 'pose of innocent yearning' central to the film's nostalgic mode: in these tableaux the exhibition value of black performance and performances of blackness so popular in turn-of-the-century US culture masquerade as the exchange value and forced productive labour of slaves (Figure 4). The film's broad confusion of one kind of labour with another enables the film to celebrate its particular version of the exchange relations of slavery: immediately following the dance, Tom rescues Eva and is quickly purchased by St Clair as a crowd of slaves and passengers cheer ebulliently. The sequencing of these spectacles, and their culmination with the sale of Tom, momentarily restores the relationship between whites and blacks to a happy 'slavery days' relationship between subjects and objects. In other words, this tableau infuses 'slavery days' with nostalgia as it celebrates the sale of one man to another.

The 'Tableaux Death of Uncle Tom' goes on to naturalize and idealize an exploitative relationship between nation and race by explicitly linking these fictional events to 'national history'. The tableau begins with Tom in the lower left-hand side of the frame, lying on the floor of a barn being comforted by another slave, who then leaves. A character whom audiences would recognize as George, the kindly son of Tom's former master, enters as an angel appears; Tom gestures in its direction and expires. As George mourns over Tom's dead body the angel disappears and four images,



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

corresponding to four 'stages' of the Civil War, appear sequentially in the upper right hand corner of the frame. The first image represents 'abolition' through a drawing of John Brown being led to his execution; 'emancipation' takes the form of an image of Abraham Lincoln standing over a black man who crouches on the ground, wearing only a loincloth; the third picture represents 'war' with an image of a battlefield; the stage of 're-unification' shows a picture of Grant and Lee shaking hands at the Appomattox Courthouse (Figure 5). These pictures display the brief chronology of a national history that ends with a picture of two white men shaking hands in a gesture of national reunification, suspended over the image of a white man mourning the passing of a black slave. In this referentially heterogeneous pictorial narrative, Uncle Tom becomes a necessary martyr for the USA's rebirth as a unified nation. The sacrifice of non-whites for the sake and strength of a great white nation was one of turn-of-the-century America's favourite stories about its origins and destiny, as well as its favourite justification for its colonial policies. It is precisely the referential heterogeneity and temporal flexibility of the cinema of attractions – its ability to select, recombine and juxtapose a range of heterogeneous fragments – that allows the film to project a nostalgic image of the nation's (racist) cultural and historical past as a cinematic attraction for its contemporary audience.

The 'Teddy' Bears' accomodation of ambivalence

Just as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appropriates an available fiction to produce a nostalgic vision of the nation's ante-bellum past, *The 'Teddy' Bears* (Edison Co., 1907) deploys a nineteenth-century fairy-tale in order to tell what Miriam Hansen calls a 'grim little allegory' about US imperialism, for the film extends the story's traditional ending with a chase through the woods which ends with the actor playing Theodore Roosevelt gunning down Mama and Papa Bear. In her analysis of this film, Hansen describes the shift from the film's fairy-tale beginning to its political ending as follows: 'Porter transposes this rather regressive scenario [of the fairy-tale] into the domain of newsreels and political cartoons – an adult world of imperialism, nativism, and racism, a country whose social others were immigrant, black, and working class'.⁴¹ As Hansen notes, the film's rapid shift from its fairy-tale world to an adult world of imperialism demanded 'a viewer capable not only of shifting between diverse positions and referential contexts but also of getting pleasure from the disjunction, from surrendering, if momentarily, to the authority of narration'.⁴² In what follows I would like to focus on the relation between the film's referential heterogeneity and its link to imperialism; in particular I am interested in the effects of *The*

41 Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon. Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 52

42 Ibid., p. 50

'Teddy' Bears' synthesis of the various textual outcomes of the early cinema's encounter with empire discussed above.

Like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The 'Teddy' Bears* concludes its retelling of a familiar story with the appearance of a political figure heavily associated with racial politics and national history, and in the process revises the meaning of the preceding tableaux. In addition to his incarnation as the teddy bear, Roosevelt figured in a range of films spanning a number of genres. While some of these films satirized his well-known ideas on American masculinity and the health of the nation (such as *Terrible Ted* [Biograph, 1907] and *The Strenuous Life; Or, Anti-Race Suicide* [Edison Co., 1904]) and his solicitous relation to the press (as does *Terrible Ted the Grizzly King* [Edison Co., 1901]), other actualities, such as those representing the Spanish–American War, McKinley's assassination, and his travel adventures, document and solemnize Roosevelt's position at the centre of the nation's life. Moreover, Roosevelt was a prolific author of well-known works such as *The Winning of the American West*, which links the nation's health, welfare and imperial prowess to a particularly brutal policy of colonial domination. In one chapter, Roosevelt places the USA's expansion within the ongoing legacy of 'the spread of the English Speaking Peoples', whose global spread and imperial dominance he links to the fact that they 'slew or drove off or assimilated the original inhabitants', taking 'neither creed nor custom, neither law nor speech from their beaten foes'.⁴³ Like *Uncle Tom's* fictional connection to slavery and the legacy of the Civil War, Roosevelt's discursive, political and historical connection to a range of national-imperial events taking place at the turn of the century made him an available mass-mediated figure through which to articulate changing conceptions of nation, race and empire.

Thus, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The 'Teddy' Bears* combines fictional narratives and characters with historical figures and allegory. Yet, while the generic and referential heterogeneity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* does not seem to have caused at the time of its release any confusion over its intended audience, the heterogeneity of *The 'Teddy' Bears* did. Although one advertisement for the film described it as a 'laughable satire on the popular craze',⁴⁴ thereby suggesting an address to more sophisticated and knowing audiences, the titular reference to a child's toy and the film's use of the Goldilocks and the Three Bears story seem to have raised different expectations. One reviewer expressed the following disappointment:

Probably based upon the fairy tale of 'Golden Locks and the Three Bears', 'The "Teddy" Bears' series at the Colonial this week is made enjoyable through the mechanical acrobatic antics of a group of the fluffy haired little hand-made animals. The closing pictures showing the pursuit of the child by the bear family is spoiled through a hunter appearing on the scene and shooting two.

⁴³ Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the American West*, volume 1 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900), p. 5.

⁴⁴ *Moving Picture World*, 27 April 1907.

Children will rebel against this portion. Considerable comedy is had through a chase in the snow, but the live bears seemed so domesticated that the deliberate murder in an obviously faked series left a wrong taste of the picture as a whole.⁴⁵

This particular reviewer's displeasure seems to result from the disruption of his indulgence in the more innocent and childishly appealing pleasures of the animated dancing bears and the chase comedy by a shockingly 'deliberate murder'. Undoubtedly the referential and generic heterogeneity of the film's component parts contributed to the experience of incongruity. In turn, I would argue that this incongruous heterogeneity is closely related to the film's synthesis of the contradictory yet characteristically modern responses to US imperialism discussed above.

The film's ending seems less incongruous with its fairy-tale beginning once we consider the idea that it re-presents Goldilocks and the Three Bears not as a cautionary tale for children, but as a nostalgic fantasy for adults – one which provides a momentary return to the desires and visual pleasures licensed by childhood curiosity and wonder (a reading supported by the reviewer's peevish response to the disruption of his delight in the dancing bears and chase comedy). Thus the camera traces the little girl's movements through the house and aligns the spectator's look with hers as she watches dancing bears through a peephole, thereby allowing the audience to indulge in a childish scopic curiosity and respond (as she does) with delight, derision and astonishment at the various visual displays found within the Bear home. Like Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Goldilocks and the Three Bears lends itself well to nostalgia, for it returns the spectator not to a simpler time in the nation's past, but to the simpler past of childhood's innocent naughtiness. In this way, *The 'Teddy' Bears* appropriates a familiar fairy-tale, submits it to a number of changes, and recasts it as a visually pleasurable story of exploration, invasion and appropriation narrated from a position of 'innocent yearning', used both 'to capture people's imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination'.⁴⁶

46 Rosaldo, 'Imperialist nostalgia', p. 108.

Thus while this cinematic return to the narrative and scopic pleasures of childhood infuses the film with the innocent nostalgia for an individual past, various signs brand this longing as imperialist nostalgia. *The 'Teddy' Bears* opens in the studio setting of a cottage in the woods, with the strange image of a rather grotesquely costumed Baby Bear dancing with a teddy bear. Mama Bear beckons him to come inside and, when he refuses, she and Papa Bear chase him around, tackle him and drag him inside by his ear. The Bear family then reappears, Papa and Baby Bear in three-piece suits, and Mama Bear in a dress and shawl. Rather than suggesting a cute replica of domesticity, the artificiality of the set, the bear suits, and their clothing make them seem like a bad copy of an Anglo-

47 *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, volume 17, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1955).

48 For another example of the hypercorporealization of racial difference, see the Edison Co.'s *Laughing Gas* (Edwin Porter, 1904), which begins with a dentist administering laughing gas to an African-American woman and consists of a series of tableaux documenting her movement through the town as she infects various groups of initially shocked passers-by with her laughter. Like the representation of Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, this display of black femininity laughing for, and with, their respective audiences are racist spectacles constructed through early cinema's formal emphasis on shock, surprise and display.

49 Miriam Hansen provides a close analysis of the significance of keyhole shots to voyeurism, exhibitionism and early film spectatorship in *Babel and Babylon*, pp. 34–42.

50 Rosaldo, 'Imperialist nostalgia', p. 107.

American middle-class family. A visual disjunction occurs between the two layers of costuming, which appear to derive from different and ostensibly incongruous origins: the 'bear' layer of the costumes stands as an essential identity which the signs of western bourgeois domesticity fail to transcend. Thus the film's version of difference is uncanny in the Freudian sense of the term: the bear home appears as a strange-yet-familiar repetition of middle-class domesticity.⁴⁷ This *unheimlich* version of western domesticity inscribes the bears as a comically 'primitive' form of the patriarchal family, an attempt at 'civilization' further undermined by the physical violence (presented as physical comedy) that disrupts the bears' attempts to complete the routine activities that structure everyday family life (dressing up to go out, eating dinner, retiring to bed). In turn, the general inability of all of the members of the Bear family to stay on their feet (Baby Bear falls down the stairs on his way to bed; they fall over one another as they chase Goldilocks around the bedroom and later as they chase her through the woods) is part of the film's production of its fictional race as a shocking spectacle that relies on a hyper-corporealization of difference.⁴⁸

Importantly, the bears' vaudevillian clumsiness provides a contrasting backdrop against which the film produces an idealized image of commodifiable difference. The little girl goes upstairs and tries the handle of a door that is locked. Unable to gain entry, she looks through a peephole into a room containing five toy teddy bears who execute an acrobatic performance for her delight. Although by 1907 the keyhole shot was a recognizable visual code for voyeurism, it functions somewhat differently in this sequence,⁴⁹ for in this film the peephole is simply a gap in a barrier that separates the bears from the Goldilocks. Like earlier spectators who had found delight in the 'exotic' dances and material cultures shown in 'foreign views', Goldilocks ultimately relies upon Roosevelt to bridge the gap between her world and the one viewed through the peephole to satisfy the desire provoked by moving images. In effect, this sequence privileges the dancing bears over the Bear family by substituting the film's earlier version of difference as the visually uncanny mixture of the grotesque Bear family with the homogenous, technically astonishing image of cute and nimble bears. Stripped of the signs of western domesticity, the dancing bears and the space they occupy appear as a 'purer' version of bear culture, one which seems to precede the changes that have resulted in the uncanny mixture of the Bear family. The privileging of the dancing bears and the longing they provoke in Goldilocks suggest post Spanish-American war imperialist nostalgia 'for the colonized culture as it was "traditionally" (that is when [the colonizing culture] first encountered it)'.⁵⁰

The uncanny mixture of the Bear family's world – its contrast to the space seen through the peephole and the outdoor setting of the

51 Philip Rosen 'Disjunction and ideology in a preclassical film: *A Policeman's Tour of the World*, *Wide Angle*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1990), p. 20.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

53 Hansen reads the film's shift between its distinct mises-en-scene as a part of 'a more general shift that preceded the transition to the classical mode', which 'entailed the adaptation of stylistic elements of the newsreel genre (authentic locations, mobile framing, greater variety of camera distance and angle) to the narrative film' that began around 1903. in 'Adventures of Goldilocks: spectatorship, consumerism and public life', *Camera Obscura*, vol. 22 (1990), p. 63.

chase – is further underscored through a codification of the early cinema's heterogeneous diegesis. As Philip Rosen notes, diegetic space in early cinema is marked by a visible disjunction between the flatness and artificiality of studio-shot scenes and the contrasting depth of outdoor actuality settings.⁵¹ Rosen argues that in *A Policeman's Tour of the World* (Pathé, 1906) such visible spatial disjunctions 'signify little narratively', allowing the spectator to experience them primarily as 'stylistic disruption'.⁵² Yet in *The 'Teddy' Bears*, stylistic differences in the mise-en-scene create a highly visible contrast between the two spaces and their occupants which, when combined with the film's narrative events and referential material, has the effect of coding these spaces racially. The artificiality of the studio setting of the bear home and the 'realism' of the outdoor setting from which Goldilocks arrives, and through which the bears chase her, creates a dangerous dichotomy in the diegesis: the little girl enters the different-yet-similar world of the bears only to be threatened and chased, and the bears enter the similar-yet-different actuality setting only to be killed. Thus, while the disjunction between outdoor and indoor space marks this film as pre-classical, its ability to codify these differences (and thereby to make disjunctive space into narrative space) is symptomatic of the film's historical position on the threshold between the cinema's preclassical and classical modes of representation.⁵³

As in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the generic prescriptions of the chase comedy and the racial logic of early twentieth-century American culture collide in this film. The chase that follows the discovery of Goldilocks in bed places her in a narrative and visual position of vulnerability from which she is rescued: Roosevelt, who appears in a costume that looks much like his Rough Rider uniform, shoots Mama and Papa Bear, and thereby transforms the fairy-tale into a mini-dramatization of the racial politics of US imperialism. Roosevelt thus returns to the cottage with Goldilocks and Baby Bear and loots it of the teddy bears. The political logic that idealizes cultural difference in terms of the exchangeable objects and accessible spaces that are unique to it, and then appropriates those commodities at the expense of the population that produces them, is a crudely imperialist one.

The 'Teddy' Bears transforms a nineteenth-century cautionary tale about little girls and their relationship to private property into a nationally specific twentieth-century spectacle about little white girls and their relationship to racial difference. Whereas the fairy-tale provides a shameful example of a little girl who misunderstands her proper place in someone else's home, *The 'Teddy' Bears* grants Goldilocks satisfaction of the desires provoked by her invasion, for the chase comedy transforms her into a heroine whose immediate peril provides an alibi for imperial aggression. Indeed, Roosevelt's status as an overdetermined image of US imperialism contrasts

strikingly with, and foregrounds, Goldilocks' fictional status, and gives her the appearance of being *outside* of the imperial project: the apparently naive and historically innocent little girl seems simply to wander into the wrong frame, the wrong mise-en-scene of the racially marked space belonging to the Bear family. The ostensible innocence of this initial mistake – made visually compelling by the cinema's ability to produce the appearance of proximity between two visually disjunctive spaces and to make this disjunction meaningful – provides the impetus for the Bear family's removal. It is because Goldilocks herself does not appear to be clearing this already occupied space for white appropriation that Roosevelt can. Thus Roosevelt provides Goldilocks with the teddy bears she desires only after having protected her from a threatening figure of difference; in turn, the alignment of Goldilocks with the uniformed Roosevelt invests the Rough Riders with innocence by incorporating their most famous soldier into a story about little girls in jeopardy. This association not only nationalizes the film's imperilled heroine, but also makes Roosevelt the hero of a miniature empire and places him on the side of vulnerable femininity, childhood and toys.

The 'Teddy' Bears places a number of contradictory responses to the war into story form. The film starts with an 'innocent' exploration fuelled by a visual fascination with, and desire for, an initially inaccessible space and its occupant/objects. The pleasures associated with this adventure are then disrupted by a threatening encounter with the 'other', which is ultimately brought under control by the appearance of a colonial agent who, through an exertion of imperial mastery and power, rescues the little girl from a threatening image of difference. While this reading is quite different from one that would emphasize the way the film also appears to lampoon Roosevelt, I would argue, along with Hansen, that the film's formal and generic heterogeneity generates a semantic richness which makes a number of meanings simultaneously available.⁵⁴ The film fluctuates ambivalently between, on the one hand, an imperialist nostalgia for a more 'innocent' time of exploration and discovery, and, on the other, a fascination with the displays of trauma, shock, surprise and power linked to imperial conflict and conquest. The ambivalence of this fluctuation hinges upon the audience's alignment with the little girl rather than with Roosevelt (the agent of colonialism) or the Bear family (the objects of domination), and is symptomatic of a culture that is capable of lampooning the individual excesses of Roosevelt while simultaneously benefiting materially and culturally from the military excesses of overseas expansion. Indeed, the formal features of the cinema of attractions and the referential heterogeneity of early story films enabled them to absorb and accommodate the incongruous forms of address and contradictory responses demanded by the war and imperial ideology. The early

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 62.

cinema's manufactured perception and the proliferation and circulation of its images helped to stitch imperial ideology into the cultural fabric of the nation and the nation into the fabric of imperial ideology.

White man, white mask: Mephisto meets Venus

ANIKÓ IMRE

I am aware that yet another reference in a title to Frantz Fanon's 'touchstone' work¹ is likely to meet with boredom. The possibilities for variation on the theme of cultural mimicry, masquerade and hybridity that *Black Skin, White Masks* opens up may seem to have been exhausted.² Most of the analyses inspired by Fanon have, however, retained the dominant racial axis of his work. I would like to concentrate precisely on the aspect of *Black Skin, White Masks* that is not specific to black skin, on what has made Fanon into something of a 'global theorist'.³ Thus, my reference in the title is to a central, paradigmatic piece in a larger body of writing on the constitution of racialized and colonized bodies and psyches.

I would like to use Fanon's work to show how the self-portrait of the colonized, black intellectual analogically fits that of the white, Eastern European intellectual, which I wish to demonstrate through István Szabó's two films, *Mephisto* (1981) and *Meeting Venus* (1991). The goal is not to divest postcolonial discourses of their spatial and temporal specificity, let alone to turn race into a mere sign. On the contrary, it is to infuse the postcolonial field with fresh energy by providing a new perspective, a new territory to *colonize* (and staying simultaneously conscious of – in fact, calling attention to – the dangers involved in this paradoxical project). Looking at Eastern European cultures through a postcolonial grid has several important implications. First of all, it should reposition the reigning concepts of colonizer and colonized, and significantly modify the organizing binary oppositions of the field (First World/Third World, white/non-white) – since Eastern European countries geographically

- 1 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).
- 2 Just a few titles that make an explicit reference to Frantz Fanon's work: Michael Rogin and David Nasaw, 'Blackface, white noise: Jewish immigrants in the Hollywood melting pot', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 102, no. 4 (1997), pp. 12–44; Declan Kiberd, 'White skin, brown masks? Celticism and negritude', *Eire-Ireland*, vol. 31, nos 1–2 (1996), pp. 1–63; David R. Roediger, 'Labor in white skin: race and working class history', in *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 21–38; Gwen Bergner, 'Who is that masked woman? or, the role of gender in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*', *PMLA*, vol. 110, no. 1 (1995), pp. 75–89.
- 3 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 'Critical Fanonism', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17 (1992), pp. 457–70.

4 Eastern Europe, like Ireland, constitutes a disruption in the dialectic of (European) colonizer and (racialized) colonized. Therefore there is a tendency in 'classic', as well as in more recent, writings on coloniality to avoid mentioning these countries altogether, or to lock them within the problematic of 'nationalism'. See, for example, Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 91; Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Black Orpheus*, trans. S.W. Allen (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1948), pp. 21–2.

5 Bergner, 'Who is that masked woman?', pp. 75–89.

6 The dominant academic approach to Eastern European cultures (on both sides of the former Iron Curtain) is sociological, descriptive and hostile to critical discourses such as feminism, queer studies and postcolonial studies. In the West, this approach is practised within 'Slavic Studies', a designation which, tellingly, excludes the few East European, but non-Slavic languages. Furthermore, western academic attention is overwhelmingly focused on Russia and the former Soviet Union. See the Introduction to Pamela Chester and Sibelan Forrester (eds), *Engendering Slavic Literatures* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. vii–xvii; Beth Holmgren, 'Bug inspectors and beauty queens: the problems of translating feminism into Russian', in Ellen E. Berry (ed.), *Postcommunism and the Body Politic* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 15–31; Vida Penezic, 'Women in Yugoslavia', in Berry (ed.), *Postcommunism and the Body Politic*, pp. 57–77.

and culturally belong to a colonizing Europe, but historically have not taken part in colonization, and are almost devoid of racial differences. Postcolonial thinking would become more inclusive by taking into consideration Europe's own backyard: while Eastern European nationalisms are blindly Eurocentric, taking almost no notice of the world outside Europe, the First/Third World dialectic of postcolonial studies accepts the idea of a Europe without divisions (that is, it ignores Eastern Europe.)⁴ Furthermore, a postcolonial framework should help articulate the effaced colonial relationship between Eastern European and western intellectuals; it should demystify the former's persisting roles as (self)-appointed national representatives, and the latter's complicity in perpetuating those roles.

The analogy I am setting up between the work of the black, colonized, Martiniquan intellectual and the white, Eastern European intellectual is valid not only at the level of the universal psychoanalytic (Lacanian), tragically split subject, which is where they both ultimately encourage their readers to place them. I want to emphasize that there are similar political necessities that motivate the preference for such a universal, 'human' subject to solid and essential racial and cultural identities. The main concern of this essay, however, is not to claim victim status for Eastern Europe, East-Central Europe, or Hungary; even less to advocate an Eastern European 'mind', in the way Fanon tries to isolate a black psychology. The analogy is a means of highlighting the way in which an omnipotent, *masculine, heterosexual*, intellectual subject, who claims to occupy a neutral position with regard to gender and sexual differences – and also with regard to race, in Szabó's case – emerges from both contexts.

The mechanism with which the 'universal' intellectual subject maintains its transparency by removing the feminine, the homosexual, and the person of colour from subjecthood has been rendered familiar through feminist, racial, postcolonial and queer theories. Similarly Fanon's 'universal' subject has not been left intact.⁵ The same criticism does not seem to apply when it comes to Eastern European cultural products, unabashedly displaying gender, sexual, and racial exclusions (which is obviously not only, or not even, an ideological question for those most afflicted by the exclusions). This blind spot is maintained by a disavowed, continuing Cold War co-operation between the native intellectual (mimicking the West) and the condescending, and to some extent guilt-stricken, western intellectual (legitimizing the former as the representative of his region/nation).⁶ The exchange between western and eastern intellectuals continually re-legitimizes the erasure of very real, subnational differences, which is the condition of the traditional privilege of the Eastern European intellectual to speak for the nation.

While I will claim that Eastern Europe's frontier position in Europe has made it into a type of a colony for the West (as well as

for the East, most recently Russia), I am far from suggesting that the lack of a conspicuous racial divide from the 'colonizer' can be ignored when making comparisons to 'proper' colonial subjects such as Fanon. The lack of racial difference between the colonizer and the colonized is a crucial factor in allowing the colonizer(s) to remain transparent, and the fact of colonization to remain apparently untheorizable.

Mephisto's masks

Black Skin, White Masks is an analysis of the psychological plight of the racialized, colonized (male) subject, intended to legitimate Frantz Fanon, the black, male psychoanalyst from the French colony Martinique, in his 'manhood'.⁷ The black colonized body lives an aggravated version of the Lacanian paradox ego, which is constituted in a continual performance of his own (mirror)-image: he is deemed to construct his authenticity through the colonizer's (French) language. The colonizer's language comes with in-built racism and negrophobia, which the colonized consequently internalizes. His psychological constitution will be determined by guilt over having to despise himself and his kind, and by shame over not being able to achieve the white superego that he is educated and socialized to emulate. Both apparent choices available to him, 'reclaiming his negritude' and denying it, only perpetuate the unbearable paradox, (although Fanon does not categorically dismiss either). The only way out seems to be to make a metaphorical leap from the conflictual state of his flesh towards what all human beings, or at least all black human beings, have in common. This point, however, remains ambiguous. He insists on 'the fact of blackness',⁸ which lends a specific black *Weltanschauung* (view of the world) to colonized black people. This assertion, however, compels him to dismiss the 'little gulf' among various shades of black – that is, the continuity among skin colours, and the constructedness of racial difference – as 'not really dramatic', something that can be overcome by an 'intellectual understanding' of these differences.⁹ To this class-based exclusion from black subjecthood of those not capable of 'intellectual understanding', he adds the exclusion of women. The colonized black subject's desire for whiteness is inseparable from the desire for full masculinity: his plight is tragic, while the black woman's claim to full subjecthood is laughable, at best. He resents being a racial spectacle precisely because it puts him in the feminine position of the object of the white gaze. White women do not deserve more respect from Fanon, either: they serve as fetishes in the traffic between the men of the two races.

Fanon's obliviousness to the fact that, with his exclusions, he is supporting the same rigid hierarchical structure that fixes him in an

⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, p. 212.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 83–109.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

10 Claudia Dreifus, 'Doctor to the human condition' (interview with István Szabó), *The Progressive*, vol. 46, no. 8 (1982), pp. 47–49; John W. Hughes, 'Mephisto: István Szabó and "the Gestapo of suspicion"', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1981), pp. 13–18; Lenny Rubenstein, 'Dreams and nightmares: an interview with István Szabó', *Cinéaste*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1982), p. 36; István Zsugán, 'Egy karakter története: beszélgetés Szabó Istvánnal', *Filmvilág*, vol. 23, no. 1, (1981), pp. 18–23.

11 Walter Kaufmann, *Goethe's Faust: the Original and a New Translation* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 22–3.

12 Stanislaw Baranczak, for instance, calls East Central Europe 'the kingdom of the intellect'. Joanna Nowicki, 'Közép-kelet-európai sztereotípiák: vonzalom, gyanakvás és identitás', *Regio*, vol. 1, nos 1–2 (1995), p. 17. Ádám Fejér develops the idea that Hungarian culture is inherently 'transcendent' into a mission that Hungarian thought has to perform to renew European philosophy. He compares this task entrusted with Hungarian intellectuals to that of biblical Jews. Ádám Fejér, *Régiók népeinek kulturális örömhátterének és a regény* (Szeged: Jatepress, 1993), pp. 138–45.

13 For a paradigmatic discussion of 'politically committed' Eastern European cinema, see David W. Paul (ed.), *Politics, Art and Commitment in the East European Cinema* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1983).

inferior position has mostly been attributed to the times when he was writing. It is all the more surprising that a very similar process of masculine, intellectual self-legitimation, carried out in 1981, has not been criticized for its politics. The Hungarian István Szabó's film, *Mephisto*, has been unanimously accepted, by Hungarian and foreign critics alike, to be what the director has claimed in his interviews: the portrait of a *human*, or – in the narrowest definition Szabó provides – a *talented type* of human, who becomes seduced by power.¹⁰ This 'human', however, is represented in the film by a *German* actor (transplanted into the film from a novel by Klaus Mann), whose greatest role on stage and in life is Mephistopheles, from Goethe's *Faust*. *Faust* has been hailed as a key opus, an incarnation of the *German* character as well as of *western man* and western civilisation, represented by the duality of Faust and Mephistopheles in the centre: one embodying incurable romanticism, the other its very negation, by means of humour and sarcasm.¹¹

The cultural location is thus so specific that it undermines the director's claim to be representing 'human' issues. What is also conspicuous is that Szabó's Hungarian/Eastern European background disappears behind what constitutes the 'universal' for an Eastern European artist: 'Europe', which for Hungarians is traditionally crystallized in, and mediated by, German culture. The mimicry that is evident from the very choice of material is not simply a consequence of the fact that the film was made as a West German–Hungarian coproduction. Passing as western/European – impossible for Fanon, the black man – is a feasible mode of existence for the Eastern European intellectual of the 1980s. The region's undeniable economic/political inferiority to the West is intellectually compensated for by an elect few who, consciously or not, masquerade as western by 'transcending' invariably painful and shameful national identities and operating at a 'human' level, free of everyday politics. This metaphysical leap has become so crucial for some Eastern European intellectuals in recent decades that they have come to justify it as a part of national or regional character.¹²

There is a paradox involved in the Eastern European artist/intellectual's desire to escape the historical expectation of 'political commitment'.¹³ On the one hand, the privilege of speaking for the suffering is predicated on the naturalized myth of the unified nation. On the other hand, national (as well as gender, racial and sexual) identities cease to be binding, or even 'real', in the pure realm of aesthetics where the artist/intellectual claims to reside. The fact that Eastern European countries have been in an almost permanent state of self-defence throughout their histories has periodically turned the privileged political task of the intellectual/artist into a heroic mission, ever since the birth of Eastern European nations in the early nineteenth century. Communist oppression re-legitimated the 'internal dissident' artist as the self-

¹⁴ Consider, for instance, the revealing ambiguity with which the Eastern European filmmaker's 'Herculean' or 'Faustian' task of national representation is described in Paul, *Politics, Art, and Commitment*, pp. 1–28. Yvette Biró's article 'Pathos and irony in East European films' in the same volume (pp. 28–49) tries to resolve the dilemma that the Eastern European artist's public role is both forced by the state and voluntarily assumed by a temporal split: she associates coercion with the first period of Eastern European Communism and a voluntary, 'good' transformation of the artist's role with the latter, more lax socialist period.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–28.

¹⁶ Fredric Jameson, 'Third-world literature in the era of multinational capitalism', *Social Text*, no. 15 (Fall 1986), p. 65.

appointed voice and conscience of the nation.¹⁴ It was particularly true of filmmakers, highly regarded by Communist regimes as a *voice* of propaganda, and acting in their self-imposed roles as the *conscience* of the community through the much-heralded, allegorical, double discourse of resistance to Communist dictatorship: a coded way of talking about the regime without mentioning its name.¹⁵ While, as Fredric Jameson claims, in colonized Third World cultures, 'and in the most vital areas of the Second World', national allegory indicates that the public and the private, the political and the poetic, are always intertwined,¹⁶ it is also obvious that, at the same time, the analogical structure of allegory keeps the two terms artificially separate. What makes the artist/intellectual's seamless transition into the sphere of universality possible is precisely this very significant, false split between art and politics. It is this conceptual gap that prevents discussions of the politics of art, the art of politics, and the complicity between artists and politicians, in Eastern European cultures.

Szabó's *Mephisto* is a particularly refined example of the Eastern European artist's wish-fulfilling assimilation into the West of Europe. What distinguishes his strategies from those of Fanon is precisely his apparent lack of awareness of this underlying political project. While Fanon analyzes his conflicting desires in psychoanalytic terms, Szabó presents his version of the 'universal' divided ego in the 'politically neutral' language of art and philosophy, through theatrical performance, and through the stock metaphors of the mask and the mirror, for instance. This is not a simple difference in the medium of representation. Szabó, in interviews, expresses hostility towards 'western' psychoanalytic interpretations of *Mephisto* and emphasizes, instead, the conflict between the individual and the fateful historical forces that operate through visible political power – represented by the Nazis in the film.

Although, occasionally, Szabó also refers to *Mephisto* as a 'character study', this still only allows for the concept of a sort of group psychology. Socialism, in Eastern Europe, did not seem compatible with the unconscious. Officially, unconscious desires appeared as irritating ('bourgeois') fantasies for those who had nothing more important to do than analyze themselves while the inherently superior, and always urgent, national-social-political concerns were waiting for solutions. Significantly, Szabó's paradigmatic refusal in the 1980s to yield to the expectation of putting his art at the service of politics did not extend to the refusal of the dominant binary, allegorical framework of representation; this allowed him to maintain the *privilege* of political representation without taking full *responsibility* for his actual politics. Similarly, those who participated in the ethically superior sphere of public issues (politicians, intellectuals and artists, whether working for or against the regime), had the power, and had good reason, to defend

the exclusive and almost impenetrable allegorical representations of society: it prevented the analysis of both their own unconscious politics, and of the politics of desire on the part of those they allegedly represented. Thus, *Mephisto* is clearly an allegory, but it is highly unclear just whom Mephisto/Höfgen represents: humankind, Eastern Europeans, the Hungarian people or intellectuals?

While Fanon's failure to acknowledge historical gender oppression in favour of a racially grounded psychoanalysis exposes the contradiction in his construction of a universal soul, Szabó's failure to acknowledge the politics of the unconscious¹⁷ in favour of universal historical necessities exposes ambiguities in *Mephisto*. Szabó insists, in accordance with the Eastern European allegorical tradition, that Mephisto is an everyman (although it is obvious from the film that artists are more perfect everymen than non-artists),¹⁸ who is seduced by the irresistible (appearance of) security that political power offers. At the same time, he wishes to be a sort of analyst, a 'doctor to the human condition',¹⁹ for the viewers of the film. The film itself further contradicts the director's refusal of individual psychoanalysis. Mephistopheles, the protagonist's alter ego, is a keen analyst himself, invested with the power to name, and thus create, unconscious desires. Furthermore, Höfgen, offstage in a crucial scene, reveals a childhood memory of humiliation to his aristocratic wife, Barbara. She looks at him in incomprehension, which Höfgen interprets for us as an inability to understand shame because her social position has shielded her from such decisive psychic experiences. Höfgen's exhibitionism, his demand to 'be loved by everyone', his vicious hunger for security, becomes associated in this scene, and in several others, with a foundation of shame in his personal history. To what extent this desire is specific to class, nationality, sexuality or situation is left strategically obscure in the film. One can recognize Fanon's feeling of shame in it, which precipitates intellectual/artistic overcompensation, but here it is not permanently written on the skin, and thus offers itself to various appropriations. This is probably one of the keys to the success of *Mephisto*, and also to the balance of power relations that legitimates the director in the eyes of both western and Eastern European audiences.

The film makes it clear, with consistent visual and verbal symbolism, that Mephisto and Höfgen are inseparable, that the actor has no core of identity. It could be read as a somewhat didactic illustration of Judith Butler's widely-quoted account of the continual, reiterative *performance* of identity, based on psychoanalytic principles that are equally valid for everyone:²⁰ Höfgen repeatedly reconstitutes himself in front of the mirror, in a literal re-enactment of the mirror phase; his Mephisto mask becomes increasingly less theatrical and more continuous with his skin; he wears a Mephistoesque robe at home. It would be tempting to read a

17 My use of the term is, of course, inspired by Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

18 For an interesting sociological/philosophical analysis of the way in which Hungarian artists/intellectuals had gradually gained political power under socialism, see György Konrád and Iván Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, trans. Andrew Arato and Richard E. Allen (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979).

19 Dreifus, 'Doctor to the human condition', pp. 47–9.

20 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

21 'You could say that the Germans were seduced by the Mephisto-consciousness. And this applies to other nations as well. The trick is to give people the appearance of security. This film is, among other things, about the ability to be seduced. The reference point is intellectuals, but it really applies to everybody.' Hughes, 'Mephisto. István Szabó and "the Gestapo of suspicion"', p. 15.

22 Szabó seems to have such a catharsis in mind when, asked in an interview whether he is afraid he might sell his soul the way Höfgen did, he replies, 'I'm hoping that with this work on Mephisto, I will have gotten a protective remedy, a vaccine, from such effects. To be truly free of this human curse, you have to think about it, experience it. A film helps experience.' Dreifus, 'Doctor to the human condition', p. 48.

poststructuralist argument into the film, especially with regard to racial identity. For instance, one could claim that the Eastern European intellectual insists on the constructedness of race; he contests a monolithic understanding of 'whiteness' by showing how whiteness is not a natural condition but, rather, a process of performance, which requires white masks, white women (to marry), white clothes, white speech. However, this imposition of a western theoretical model would be a gesture of epistemic violence. Unlike Butler, who tries to reclaim a poststructuralist identity from the universal model, *Mephisto*'s explicit address remains 'human'.²¹ Höfgen's conflicts, although symbolically augmented through actual theatrical performance, are certainly not the conflicts of just 'actors', although this is how he identifies his chameleon-like existence. Any self-reflective being is invited to identify with declarations like this, at his most honest, in the company of his black lover: 'I do have a skin and body and weight, and I have eyelashes and fingernails, just like you'. And later: 'My face is not my face, my legs are not my legs, my name is not my name, 'cos I am an actor! An actor is nothing else but a mask.' There is, apparently, only an intellectual condition of identifying with Mephisto/Höfgen. Even though the Eastern European intellectual evidently performs colonial mimicry, he successfully disavows the responsibility for giving voice to unconscious, collective desires.

At the same time, to Eastern European, particularly Hungarian, audiences, *Mephisto* does seem faithful to the allegorical tradition of films that depict the artist's relationship to the seductive yet forbidding Communist regime. The parallel between Nazism in Germany and real-life socialism in Hungary is too obvious to miss. When the Nazi general remarks that Mephisto is a 'national hero', Hungarian viewers no doubt understand the barely disguised message about the compromised, yet tragic, situation of the resistant intellectual. It is, at the same time, an example of the way in which Eastern European filmmakers appropriate(d) the national 'we' with unquestionable authority. When Höfgen takes a trip to Budapest to shoot a film, the scene opens with a film-within-a-film shot of two hussars on their horses, one of them Höfgen. The hidden message relies on the Hungarian national community's sense of unity, which is partly maintained through the kind of cinematic representations of 'our' national history that the two hussars signify. This coded signal to the Hungarian viewer is concealed from the 'outsider'; it encourages a 'private' reading of the film within the (homogeneous) national family.

Being a highly self-critical piece among Eastern European allegorical films, *Mephisto* presumably helped to relieve guilt over the Mephistoesque compromises that intellectuals invariably made under socialism.²² In the West, however, the local allegorical reading can easily be ignored in favour of 'global' theories of *Mephisto*, the

cinematic equivalent of *Black Skin, White Masks*. Again, the significant difference is that, unlike Fanon, the Eastern European filmmaker is accepted as equal since he speaks a 'universal' language without conspicuous racial difference. The colonial mimicry is successful without anyone identifying it as either colonial or mimicry.

The Eastern European filmmaker's transformation into a 'universal' intellectual requires, as does Fanon's, its sacrifices: the illusion of a 'universal' identity is created by following the binary logic of exclusion, and is maintained by the subsequent disavowal of the exclusion. Höfgen has no inhibitions in using women to achieve his goals – just as Fanon's black man is authorized to use the white woman, through marriage and sex, in order to become a real man. Mephisto's white women (Barbara, Nicoletta, Dora, Bella, Lotte), however, are eager to please him. They do not seem to be lacking or to deserve better treatment. They are natural devices to help the ambitious male climb higher in power.



Juliette (Karin Boyd) and Höfgen (Klaus Maria Brandauer) in *Mephisto*. Picture courtesy: BFI Stills. Distributed by Cinegate

Höfgen's mulatto lover, Juliette, appears to be an exception to this. Although she is, like the others, under Höfgen's spell, she continually confronts him with his ethical degradation. Eliciting sympathy for the woman of colour, the icon of the oppressed, can be read as a demonstrative gesture towards the West to gain credit for political correctness in gender/racial issues – an important element in the mimicry. However, the fact that in most of Eastern Europe the woman of colour is a symbol without referent – so however she is represented does not interfere with widespread, quite blatant racism and sexism – undermines the assumption of such representational sensitivity. This is especially true if we consider another important aspect of Juliette's depiction: not only is she Höfgen's lover, she is also his dancing instructor. Her fluid, sensuous movement to the music, as well as her naked body, displayed in the bed scene that follows the dancing lesson, recall the eroticization and exoticization of the woman of colour in colonial situations. The camera does nothing to dissociate itself from Höfgen's objectifying gaze. When the two of them are juxtaposed dancing together, the marked contrast between Juliette's eroticism and Höfgen's imitative, awkward style justifies Höfgen's wish to learn to act naturally from the most natural creature of all: the black woman. In this light, Juliette's wisdom is not one of erudite sophistication, but the exoticized knowledge of the natural being, coloured by the exoticized knowledge of the oppressed. It is this knowledge, which arises from the 'objectivity' of the oppressed, of the suffering, that Höfgen shares with her – and it is precisely the lack of such knowledge that precludes real communication between him and the upper-class, white woman Barbara, as I noted earlier. This analogy between the black woman's and the white male artist's (or, allegorically, the white male Eastern European artist's) suffering, helps to fix the black woman as a metaphor and reify the artist's transparency. Significantly, Szabó did not go so far in empowering Juliette as to retain from the original novel the sadomasochistic sexual relationship between her (as the top) and Höfgen (as the bottom). There is an indication of this possibility at the beginning of their initial encounter in the film, only to be reversed within the same scene, when Juliette obediently submits to Höfgen's narcissism for the rest of the film. Her agency is constantly undermined by her voluntary submission to his wishes, despite the fact that she sees a truer version of Mephisto than do his other women.

Höfgen/Mephisto, just like Fanon, is feminized in his subjection to power, in this case embodied by the Nazi general. When the two first meet in the theatre, the general gives him a long, evaluative gaze which establishes Mephisto in the feminine position of spectacle that Fanon so resents. Höfgen is afforded the reverse-shot, however. Besides, as an actor, he enjoys a wider range of gender performances than ordinary men do. His 'weak' masculinity is also

counterbalanced by his obvious ability to seduce powerful women and to control the men subordinated to him, as he does with the young actor, Hans Miklas. Interestingly, as Höfgen progressively identifies with his favourite stage role offstage, his Mephisto mask becomes increasingly coded as feminine. A link is suggested between the lack of firm ethical grounds (Höfgen's seduction by Mephistopheles) and the corruption brought to him by actual women: Höfgen returns to Nazi Berlin from abroad, despite his suspicions of what he can expect, because one of his female colleagues lures him back with a letter giving a falsely flattering picture of the political situation. In an even more revealing scene, towards the end, his second wife, Nicoletta von Niebuhr, offers him consolation in his grief. Her face is painted partly white in an obvious reference to Mephistopheles. Some of the paint rubs off onto Höfgen's face, which makes him recoil, as if from a frightening realization. What the viewer is simultaneously prompted to recognize is that something evil is transmitted from the woman to the man. In both interpretive frameworks – the explicit one about the relationship between the Communist regime and the artist, and the effaced one about the relationship between the colonized artist and the West – the price to pay for the masquerade that guarantees power through metaphorical whitening is a decline into corruptive, metaphorical femininity.

Szabó's manipulation of the original novel also reveals the way in which the film depoliticizes sexuality: the protagonist's homosexuality in the Mann novel is excised in the film version. Asked why, Szabó usually gives the intriguing reply that he did not want the audience to be *distracted* by this 'other area', which is on a 'psychological plane' and has nothing to do with any of the film's concerns. It would have prevented the 'normal' audience from identifying with Mephisto; from a 'collective interrogation' of themselves, which the depiction of 'human' soul-perversions of the Nazi era should provoke.²³ This reply presumes, or pretends to presume, in a typical Eastern European fashion, that the audience is heterosexual (and, if not, it should still identify with fictional characters in the 'normal way'). It also supports the allegorical representational scheme of the colonized, in which history/politics and 'psychology' operate isolated from, and subordinated to, each other. It lends ideological support to the homophobia of the 'innocent' majority which segregates the sphere of homosexuality from all other spheres, effecting the very exclusion that simultaneously constitutes the protective borders of normality.

A reference to Szabó's later film, *Colonel Redl* (1984), should further underscore my point: *Colonel Redl* is a story of upward mobility very similar to *Mephisto* (and to the 1998 film, *Hanussen*). Alfred Redl, the protagonist, a military officer of humble origins in the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army, is homosexual. His homosexuality, however, is treated as marginal to the film's concerns

²³ Hughes, 'Mephisto'. István Szabó and "the Gestapo of suspicion", pp. 7–9.

²⁴ Vera Létay, 'Mephisto ezredes', *Filmvilág*, no. 2 (1985), pp. 12–17; István Zsugán, 'Egy azonosságzavar története', *Filmvilág*, no. 2 (1985), pp. 12–17; Ágnes Losonczi, 'Szemle után', *Filmvilág*, no. 4 (1985), pp. 3–8; Péter Lengyel, 'Fénytörés', *Filmvilág*, (1985), no. 4, pp. 8–12.

and is overlooked in most Hungarian reviews.²⁴ The film gives only vague indications of it: the piano teacher caresses the child Redl's hands; a friend's father touches his hands in a manner that goes beyond the avuncular; as an adult, he has a fleeting affair with a young man. Redl's sexuality is more symbolic than real. Those few Hungarian reviews that address it at all, understand Redl's sexuality as a symbol of his general inability to fit in, clearly subordinated to his class/ethnic/national origins.

My intention is far from reducing the complexities and complexes of *Mephisto* to a simplistic demonstration of political incorrectness. Indeed, there are several moments in the film that indicate an awareness, or even an intention to voluntarily expose, the constructed borders of identity categories such as 'whiteness', 'heterosexuality' and 'fe/male'. For instance, Mephisto/Höfgen's passionate embrace with Hans Miklas in a theatrical performance within the film verges on a covertly homosexual moment of intimacy. The friendship between Höfgen's first and second wives, Barbara and Nicoletta, suggests a possibility of female bonding that is outside and against the obligatory heterosexual gender roles: in one scene, they kiss and hug in closeup, followed by a cut to Höfgen's look of incomprehension. While such moments, together with Höfgen/Mephisto's performance of whiteness mentioned earlier, might provide opportunities for western readings of attacks on the solid building of national phallogocentrism and white supremacy, such 'subtlety' of theoretical intervention was not, and is still not, likely to get through the allegorical texture of erotic/racial representations of Eastern Europe of the 1980s.

The strategic ambiguity of Höfgen's performance on the political stage helps to confirm the allegorical interpretation. Höfgen betrays Juliette and is carried along by an obviously devious power, but he also hides a Jewish man in his apartment, rescues his Communist friend Otto Ulrichs from prison and, above all, is in an increasing agony of guilt over selling his soul to Mephisto. His early enthusiasm for a Brechtian, political theatre, committed to the cause of the proletariat, is a significant counterpoint to his subsequent corruption. The very fact that he chooses to stay in his homeland after Hitler takes power, unlike those who have taken the 'easy way out' by leaving the country, is presented as courageous. Faced with the extreme wickedness of Nazi dictatorship, there seems to be no other option for survival but a chameleon-like existence. (This typically Eastern European inevitability of passing and pretending is the subject of Agnieszka Holland's *Europa, Europa* (1991). The parallel that the allegory sets up between Nazi Germany and socialist Hungary, although the two were hardly comparable in destructiveness, certainly helps to justify the Eastern European artist's flirtation with the political regime. The analogy evokes a sense of fatefulness in the repetition of history which elevates the native

²⁵ I am borrowing the term 'cultural nationalism' from György Csepeli, who writes that, as opposed to the Western European development of nationalism, 'In the other type of national development in Europe (usually to the east of the Rhine) national unity was formulated as a desire, lacking adequate economic, social, political and cultural foundations. Here the concept of 'the nation' came before the establishment of the proper national ideology therefore had to refer more actively to elements of the ethnocentric heritage such as descent, cultural values and norms.' György Csepeli, 'Competing patterns of national identity in postcommunist Hungary', *Media, Culture, and Society*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1991), p. 328.

²⁶ See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995) pp. 353–60; Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, 'From the imperial family to the transnational imaginary: media spectatorship in the age of globalization', in Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (eds), *Global/Local* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 154–9; Masao Miyoshi, 'A borderless world? From colonialism to transnationalism and the decline of the nation state', in Wilson and Dissanayake (eds), *Global/Local*, pp. 78–108. The accounts of nationalism that do grant Eastern European nations a somewhat separate discussion (for instance, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* [London: Verso 1983]) remain in the neutrality of the global scale of their observation and are not particularly concerned with critiquing subnational patriarchal oppression.

artist's plight to tragic dimensions. Humans – or, in this allegorical context, Eastern European artists under socialism – cannot directly fight supernatural powers such as Mephistopheles, evil incarnate: the flight from compromising daily politics to the terrain of universal humanity is the only alternative.

Post-Communist Mephisto

An objection to the comparison of *Mephisto* and *Black Skin, White Masks* might be that the application of the concept of colonial mimicry to the Eastern European intellectual/artist must be limited to the Communist era, which officially ended in 1989. To show that this variety of cultural colonialism has its roots in, and perpetuates, a much older and more resistant cultural nationalism,²⁶ I will discuss Szabó's 'post-Communist' film, *Meeting Venus* (1991), which was shot in Budapest but produced by a Briton, David Puttnam. The continuity between colonization and nationalism, with the latter analogically recreating the former's structures and methods, has turned nationalism into a target of critical attacks.²⁶ This criticism still bypasses Eastern Europe: nationalism and the gender, sexual and racial exclusions it necessarily effects not only survive in Eastern Europe in their modernist, naturalized mode, but are currently being reinforced throughout the region as a 'natural' defence against the aggressiveness and the unwelcome consequences of post-1989 economic and cultural transformations.²⁷ The benefits that the privileged representatives of national *culture* had gained through their distinguished public roles in the visible presence of political dictatorship have gone mostly unreflected. Besides foregrounding how 'cultural nationalism' and the national artist's mimicry of the West continue into the post-Cold War era, I also wish to call attention to the different aesthetic and political means by which this mimicry is carried out on the victorious, 'western' terrain of global capitalism.

The protagonist this time is a more overt alter ego of the director than was Mephisto: Zoltán Szántó is a Hungarian conductor who goes to Paris (as Fanon, as well as Szabó himself, did) to conduct yet another German masterpiece, Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. The fictional conductor's name not only sounds similar to the real director's but, just like the latter's, is also a very common Hungarian name. All the members of the international company have names most typical of their nationalities. Two of them – Taylor, the American, and Schneider, the former East German – actually have the 'same' surname, the equivalent of 'Szabó'. This, beyond being a postmodern joke, is an indication that we are dealing with an allegory of the new 1990s Europe, set, appropriately, on the stage of the Opera Europa.

The protagonist is caught in the old Faustian dilemma, which is

27 Catherine Portuges writes, 'paradoxically, in view of the region's acceptance – indeed, its passionate embrace – of postmodern capitalism, the gendered aspects of these transformations have remained largely untheorized in scholarly milieux, and are still virtually taboo in the rhetorics of creative expression and interpretation'. 'Gendering cinema in postcommunist Hungary', in Berry (ed), *Postcommunism and the Body Politic*, pp. 296–7.

analogous to the inescapable dialectic that binds Fanon. In Fanon's case, the opposing terms of the dialectic are political subjugation based on racial inferiority versus intellectual transcendence of colour difference. Szántó's terms can be defined as political commitment versus artistic freedom. The latter is to be achieved, in this case, through the artist's absorption into the pure aesthetics of (German) music. As Höfgen and Mephisto became inseparable in the earlier film, however, Szántó's story and initial dilemma is coloured with that of his stage hero, Tannhäuser: the classic opposition of *politics/art* partially blends into the no less ancient dichotomy of *duty/love*.

This latter duality influences the former in two important ways. First, since the duty/love opposition is the organizing principle of the *opera* world, it takes the serious edge off the film's main theme: the contaminating interference of daily politics with universal, eternal art. As in *Mephisto*, the continuity between 'stage' and 'life' conveys the ironic sense that reality is produced in performance. Unlike in *Mephisto*, however, the message here is much less radical and even less original. It does not appear to have a function other than being a 'postmodern' trick for its own sake. Secondly, the 'purity' of emotion that is conventionally associated with love helps to naturalize the corresponding term, *art*, and establishes it as a separate realm from that permeated by politics.

At the beginning of the film we see Szántó (played by the French actor Niels Arestrup) in transition from the East to the West, at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris. The images are accompanied by his comments in voiceover, in the form of a letter he is writing home to his wife. He refers to Paris as the place of 'youthful dreams' (Fanon's imaginary life of growing up in an imaginary Paris comes to mind). As we watch him being examined with suspicion at immigration and customs, he continues: 'Is it my face that irritates them? Or just the stale smell of Eastern Europe? They make me feel like a man entering a drawing room with dogshit on his shoes.' The Eastern European, presented as 'the black man of Europe', arrives in the land of dreams with a considerable baggage of shame and guilt.

The rest of the film, seamlessly mixing the omnipotent camera gaze with Szántó's first-person narration and his psychological perspective, invites a reading as an allegory of how the Eastern European artist overcomes his psychic burden and transforms himself into a 'free (Western European) man'. The music and the theme of romantic love in *Tannhäuser* provide a conventional channel of representation for this transformation. However, the most important means of achieving the 'universal' freedom of the soul remains, unsurprisingly, a woman. Her role is similar, on one hand, to that of Juliette in *Mephisto*, who 'naturalizes' the artist, and on the other, to that of the paradoxical feminine figure of Africa, who emerges in writings of the Negritude movement to confer authentic manhood and

unified subjecthood on Fanon, the black man. Unlike Juliette and the sensual/sensuous woman of Africa, however, the female device in *Meeting Venus* is a white, blonde, emancipated, phallic woman, Glenn Close. She plays the Swedish diva, Karin Anderson, the archetypal woman of the West, who helps Szabó become a natural western Man.

As the self-doubting Hungarian gradually wins her over, his ability to deal with, and rise above, the ridiculous sensitivities of the multinational, multilingual cast of the opera also increases. The Hungarian artist's dream of mastery comes true: in bed with the West, conducting Europe. The artist who realizes this dream has changed significantly since his former incarnations as Mephisto and Redl. Most importantly, the call to liberate art from the prison of politics and rehabilitate the absolute freedom of artistic talent has taken on particular urgency. Szántó's only concern now is his admiration for the music. As he puts it, 'first I have respect for Wagner and then to myself'. In the name of Wagner, something 'naturally' and 'objectively' valuable, he gradually tames the boisterous musicians. 'You are playing like children! It's an insult to Wagner!', he bursts out during one of the last rehearsals. The imagery of the exclamation is revealing: Szántó is seen, precisely, to *grow above* everybody else in the process of the production. His mature, dedicated, artist's world is in sharp contrast to the comically depicted confusions of what seems like a nursery; everybody else is oversensitive, selfish, sulking or hysterical.

As Szántó sets about resolving unfortunate incidents, specific traits emerge to indicate his superiority. He is distinguished, first of all, from the other characters who come from the 'ex-East', but could not make the liberating transition to the realm of the universal intellectual. Mr Schneider, from the ex-GDR, has been unable to shake off Communist reflexes such as collecting cans of food for rainy days. He wants to move to a less expensive hotel to save money, and asks for Szántó's help with this, appealing to the common memory uniting the ex-Soviet camp. Szántó's voiceover comments on the request: 'I had no idea what the man was talking about'. The statement is hardly credible, but plays a crucial role in turning Szántó into someone who is always-already western. Even though his body is afflicted by his 'Eastern' history – which was spotted even by the guards at the gateway to the West, in spite of its deceptive 'whiteness' – his intellect is perfectly released from the constraints of the colonized body.

The film makes a point of distinguishing Szántó from the *women* of the cast: some are in fierce competition to seduce him for no apparent reason; others seem unreasonable, ridiculous or abnormal in other ways. One singer invites him to rehearse in her flat, where she dons a revealing dress, and interrupts the 'rehearsal' with an invitation to 'dinner'. Another woman tries the sweater she is

knitting for her lover on Szabó before a rehearsal, in front of Miss Anderson and everyone else. The secretaries, the administrators, the customs officer at the airport, are all mannish, hostile female creatures. The initial hostility between Szántó and Karin Anderson is due to a comment Szántó had once made about her, and which reached her through the grapevine – as we find out during their first, reconciliatory conversation. He had called her a ‘cold lesbian’: a demonizing designation that he does not deny, but which quickly becomes erased since Miss Anderson proves her ‘good’ femininity by admiring Szántó and his love for the music.

The gay men at the Opera Europa appear tragicomic. Hans-Dietrich, the set designer, and his partner, Steve, the American singer, entirely lose control of their emotions before the performance. Hans-Dietrich even makes a drug-induced attempt at suicide, (which turns out to be his routine reaction to stress). Even more interesting is Szántó’s relationship to Gábor, an emigrant Hungarian living in Paris, part of the management of the Opera Europa and a closet homosexual. Gábor is portrayed as a duplicitous, overweight, balding, thoroughly disgusting man. He makes obscene remarks about ladies to Szántó in Hungarian; he has a Stalinist past, a West-emulating present, and a young drag-queen mistress who is not reluctant to expose their relationship as a means of blackmailing him. One of Szántó’s most triumphant acts in the process of turning the orchestra in his favour is that he publicly asks the troublemaker Gábor: Can I say something in Hungarian?’ To the reply ‘yes’, he shows the sign of the fist, which, in Hungary, (and elsewhere) is a rude assertion of one’s physical power, inherently masculine and heterosexual. This gesture is considerably at odds with the image of the refined, and ideologically neutral, artist, who is moved only by love and music.

Szántó’s sole ally is Miss Anderson; they both play the observer’s role during the conflicts. However, while Szántó suffers and tries hard to negotiate until the very end, Miss Anderson is rather indifferent: she arrives in Paris a few days late, keeping the entire ensemble waiting; she keeps an aristocratic distance from the concerns of the musicians’ union; at one point she leaves the rehearsal for a costume fitting, directing a condescending smile towards the players whose argument has momentarily interrupted the music.

Szántó sums up the cause of the Opera’s troubles in a letter to his wife: ‘Bureaucrats pretend to be artists, and artists, bureaucrats. Impossible!’ And, ‘apparently, due to democracy, nobody really seems to care about the *Tannhäuser*. Except, perhaps, Miss Anderson’. ‘Democracy’ receives a pitiful look and a derogatory name (‘bureaucracy’). In comparison with the magnificent demon of Communism, the omnipresent, everyday politics of western democracies appear irritating and sad. The comparison between the two systems is an ongoing theme in the narrative. Szántó’s two

superiors constantly remind him that he is not in 'Stalinist' times anymore, that 'democracy is a hard game', that the West does not operate by 'dictatorship'. Ultimately, however, the joke is on them. First of all, they rely on outdated, stereotypical concepts of the ex-East, derived from the darkest years of Communism. Secondly, their own measures turn out to be highly subjective and capricious, almost dictatorial. Thirdly, and most importantly, the 'people's rights' appear to Szántó, and through his eyes to the viewer, to mean the dictatorship of each group, leading to an anarchic situation which is the ultimate barrier to efficiency. The musicians' union tries to control rehearsal times as a means of negotiating with the management; they sabotage rehearsals in protest against the sponsorship of certain unfavourable transnational companies; even the curtain is subject to causes outside Szántó's notion of 'pure art'. His response to all this is, 'I can't stand this democracy of yours'.

The film validates his judgement. Szántó shows the West his own version of democracy, which is self-imposed discipline, dictated by the unifying principle of high art, with Szántó as the humble mediator between Music and the people. Even though the narrative's comic/ironic, postmodern angle seemingly undermines the feasibility of Szántó's/Szabó's project, Wagner's music does finally create multinational love, even if only for the duration of a performance. In a highly idealistic conclusion, the performers sing the *Tannhäuser* while they stand in front of the curtain, closed due to a politically motivated curtain failure. Without the interference of cheap spectacularity, the sheer power of the music – and Szántó's supreme talent – proves victorious. Not only does the theatre audience celebrate the opera without visual excess, but even Szántó's betrayed wife watches the performance on television, forgiving, defenceless against the love emanating from the music.

This illusion of solidarity, created by the Hungarian artist who brings Art/Love to the people, is more troubling than it seems. It belittles the other kinds of solidarities over which Szántó eventually triumphs: the goals of the unions seem petit-bourgeois; the preference for preserving the rainforest over playing Wagner appears utterly ridiculous. It exposes a peculiar, Eastern European moral twist, which was exacerbated by the Communist era: the otherwise 'useless', 'non-productive', 'individualistic' pursuit of art was elevated high above collective, let alone global, causes. This partly explains the general lack of responsibility about the environment, and about most things other than the accumulation of personal wealth – or, for a large part of the population, daily survival – in Eastern Europe. The film's post-Communist intellectual appropriates a very specific historical disillusionment with collectivism in order to strengthen his individual international position. He absolves himself, with relief, from the tiresome duty of guarding the nation's conscience, but retains the individual benefits of the privilege of

collective representation. It is easy to see that *Meeting Venus* and many similar post-Communist films actually play into the seductive hands of transnational capital by trivializing popular resistance to it, in order to nostalgically preserve the mystified power of art.

Szántó's outburst into an angry, improvised song about the hostilities that divisions among people bring about could be the theme song of the ideology of 'multiculturalism', with which transnational companies often successfully cover up their profit-oriented tactics. Incidentally, this is the event in the narrative that magically turns Szántó's relationship with Miss Anderson from hate to love, when the woman joins in the spontaneous song: inconvenient cultural differences among people can be erased by love and music.

By the end of the film, the Hungarian artist, who had arrived at the airport with an Eastern European psychological burden, becomes a transnational, 'western' man. He is the embodiment of Miss Anderson's *ars poetica*, 'freedom is inside'. He is the kind of Hungarian who is at the centre of the Oscar-winning *English Patient* (Anthony Minghella, 1996): his nationality is only a sign of exotic difference; his national background does not bind him in any way. The fact that Count Almásy can be played, accentless, by Ralph Fiennes, with only the title song – in a language unrecognizable in the West – to represent his pre-Saharan life, indicates that Hungarian nationality, perhaps most obviously even among obscure Eastern European nationalities, is very suitable for representing indefinite, mythical or insignificant cultural roots.

The Eastern European intellectual's cultural mimicry, a latent theme in *Mephisto*, is an already accomplished, trouble-free state in *Meeting Venus*. The gap that separates the triumphant masculine



Karin Anderson (Glenn Close) and Zoltán Szántó (Niels Arestrup) united by the music of love in *Meeting Venus*. Picture courtesy: BFI Stills. Distributed by Warner Bros.

28 Gyula Hegyi, 'Találkozás
Vénusszal: Európai operacirkusz',
Filmvilág, no. 11, (1991),
pp. 40–41.

subject from his native others, the same gap that constitutes him as a master, is even more conspicuous here. As a review points out, *Meeting Venus* has no more to say than the average Hollywood movie to most Hungarians.²⁸ The fact that the Hungarian protagonist is played by a French actor (with questionable credibility), that the few Hungarian names are westernised, that Szántó wears his wedding ring on the left hand, instead of the (Hungarian) right hand, all make the claim to authenticity rather doubtful in an otherwise realistically, if not naturalistically, presented film. The lifestyle of 'Hungarians' in the film may be familiar only to a very small, elite section of the population. During his short visit to Budapest, we encounter Szántó in the Opera House, among his family members, who all speak faultless English, at home with his physician wife, and in a hotel only affordable to westerners. A distorted picture of the new, post-Communist Eastern Europe emerges, which confers benefits for the representer, but which is also easy for the West to acknowledge with relief or indifference. This amounts to the traditional erasure of the existence of most Eastern Europeans, who do not fit the artist's self portrait but are essential for its creation.

In this respect, projects that are committed to constructively involving Eastern European cultures in 'global', post-Cold War theoretical conversations are more urgent than ever. As I have argued, the white, Eastern European woman, and a whole range of 'nonexistent' Eastern European others, would greatly benefit from the relative visibility that the West's others have been afforded in postcolonial theories. Extending the postcolonial framework to address the politics of the Eastern European national intellectual's ongoing colonial mimicry is, of course, only part of a larger process of cultural translation to be carried out between Eastern Europe and the rest of the world.

Processes of subjectification in Fassbinder's *I Only Want You to Love Me*

THERESE GRISHAM

Rainer Werner Fassbinder used deterministic social history as material for his films. He often figured this history – as has been observed by many film critics, such as Thomas Elsaesser – as the intimate experience of his protagonists and other figures, principally in terms of the family as ‘the true battlefield and theater of war’,¹ by which Elsaesser means not only institutionalized war but sociopolitical, economic and historical events and conflicts generally believed to exist outside the seemingly protective and protected nuclear family. Fassbinder’s 1976 made-for-television family melodrama and docudrama, *Ich will doch nur, daß Ihr mich liebt/I Only Want You to Love Me*, provides a strong example of this type of film.²

I Only Want You to Love Me is rarely discussed in critical surveys or essays on Fassbinder’s films, regarded as relatively unimportant partly because it was shot in fewer than three weeks, and evidently without much input from Fassbinder himself.³ Since Fassbinder was known for shooting movies quickly, it may be the latter that has influenced the implicit critical agreement that this film is simply a poor reiteration of many of Fassbinder’s family themes. It is not discussed at all in Elsaesser’s *New German Cinema*.

When *I Only Want You to Love Me* is written about, it is done so usually in purely individualistic, psychological terms as an Oedipal drama. However, the film contains a narcissistic, rather than an Oedipal, text in terms of the psychological structure of the

1 Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema: a History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. 269.

2 Bavaria Atelier GmbH (for Westdeutscher Rundfunk), 110 mins, colour. The film first aired on television on the ARD (First State) channel in West Germany on 23 March 1976.

3 The film was shot in December 1975.

- 4 Klaus Antes and Christiane Ehrhardt, *Lebenslänglich – Protokolle aus der Haft* (Munich: Piper, 1972). This collection of interviews has long been out of print, as has the whole *Reihe Roter Schnitt* (Red Edge Series) in which it was published, which belonged to the leftist division of Piper Press.

protagonist. This choice makes sense when we consider that narcissistic, rather than Oedipal, conflict is more suited to the interrelated themes of the film, foremost among them the intimate link between the narcissistic disturbance of an individual and the postwar generation of West Germans in the period following the *Wirtschaftswunder* (Economic Miracle) of the 1950s. The main action in the plot concerns Peter Trepper (played by Vitus Zeplichal) and his adult life – his marriage, work, hyper-consumerism, and his killing of a *Gastwirt* (innkeeper) in Munich for which he is serving a ten-year prison sentence. Many critics have placed this action in the 1970s, probably assuming that it takes place around the time the film was made. However, internal evidence, as well as the written text – an interview in *Lebenslänglich – Protokolle aus der Haft/In for Life: Interviews from Prison*,⁴ which was published in 1972 and from which Fassbinder wrote his script – indicate that this action takes place in the second half of the 1960s, from Ludwig Erhard's fall and the Konrad Kiesinger government up to the first year of the Willi Brandt government. Under these governments, employment and consumerism rose briefly, following a recession in 1966–7. We also see evidence of the 1950s Economic Miracle in the background of the film. Fassbinder shows the war generation in the figure of Peter's father, benefiting financially from the postwar economic boom through long-term investments that helped create and boost West German consumerism. In the foreground are this generation's links with the forward-looking ideology of West German economic policies rather than with any *Trauerarbeit* (literally, grief work) regarding Germany's past. For example, the war generation is shown as materialistic and narcissistic, raising their children on the basis of an 'economics of love' that Fassbinder equates with material achievement and narcissistic abuse. The film's style, particularly its use of *mise-en-scene*, also works to support the materialistic and narcissistic themes of the two generations.

Aside from the *mise-en-scene*, visual techniques related to narrative structure give credence to the notion that there is hope of ameliorating Trepper's psychological suffering: his only regular visitor in prison may be seen as a prison psychologist (played by Erika Runge), whose role Fassbinder seems to make very clear through flashback and flashforward techniques used to construct a 'whole' narrative out of fragments that mimic non-linear memory. In addition, he uses other filmic devices such as intertitles, repetitions with variations of family scenes, and a brief fragment of the murder's aftermath about halfway through the film, filled out and given meaning only near the end of the film, all of which support this hypothesis.

Finally, the film simulates the genre of the West German television docudrama. I view the film as a simulation rather than an actual television docudrama – although obviously it was made for,

and aired on, television – because it uses typical docudrama devices recognizable to any audience familiar with the genre to criticize West German leftist political positions and practices, of which many late 1960s and early 1970s West German television docudramas, film documentaries and written interviews formed a part. The media politics to which Fassbinder refers attempted to bring about structural change by making previously silenced, often victimized or oppressed groups, such as workers or prisoners, visible and audible. Thus, while *I Only Want You to Love Me* contains a critique of the economic and social subjectifications of West Germans, offered as catalysts for Trepper to commit murder, this critique differs markedly from those in films by other contemporary directors working in similar genres, since its critical attitude towards its subject opposes these discourses on the Left and, moreover, occurs partly at the level of the film's ultimately 'deconstructive' use of the stylistic conventions of the television docudrama. *I Only Want You to Love Me* is one of just two films Fassbinder made that combine style and theme in a similar way; as such, it deserves careful analysis.

Fassbinder directed the stylistically and thematically similar *Acht Stunden sind kein Tag/Eight Hours are Not a Day* in 1972 as a five-part series made for television, which was cancelled before it was aired in its entirety. Unlike *I Only Want You to Love Me*, it has been discussed often in the critical literature, mainly as a strong example of the genre of the *Arbeiterfilm* (working-class film), although at the time it was released, it was criticized for treating (working-class) social issues melodramatically as well as for its 'mannered' style.⁵ However, Thomas E. Erffmeyer, one of the few critics to have written about the economic rather than the individualistic aspects of *I Only Want You to Love Me*, writes that *Acht Stunden sind kein Tag* averaged between a 40% and a 65% viewing share when the segments of it that were actually broadcast were first aired.⁶ According to Erffmeyer, the impressive television audience figures imply that West German viewers were not put off by the formal devices or thematic concerns of the series.⁷ While viewer statistics are not available for *I Only Want You to Love Me*, it can be surmised that the film may have received nearly the same audience attention, since its themes and filmic elements share so much with the former film. Jane Shattuc lauds *Acht Stunden sind kein Tag* for its treatment of working-class themes and analyzes the reasons that the series was cancelled:

By producing a popular series . . . to raise worker consciousness, Fassbinder overstepped the bounds of the art cinema's discursive frame of art for art's sake; in that series he used a bourgeois genre – the family melodrama – to produce working class activism. The series was cancelled two-thirds of the way through.⁸

It must be noted that Shattuc's inferences are based on a US view of

5 Thomas Elsaesser expressed these criticisms in 'Tales of sound and fury', *Monogram*, no. 4 (1972), pp. 52–3, an issue devoted solely to melodrama.

6 Thomas Erffmeyer, 'I Only Want You to Love Me: Fassbinder, melodrama, and Brechtian Form', *Journal of the University Film and Video Association*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1983), pp. 37–43.

7 Ibid., p. 42.

8 Jane Shattuc, 'R.W. Fassbinder's confessional melodrama: towards historicizing melodrama within art cinema', *Wide Angle*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1990), pp. 44–59, 56.

Fassbinder's films. For example, the implication (in the context of Shattuc's whole article) that Fassbinder made most of his films for art house audiences is not factually true: his films were distributed in the USA for art house and film festival audiences, but in West Germany some of his films had their first runs on television and most of his films were shown in non-art house theatres. Their audiences, then, were more diverse than those in the USA. In fact, *I Only Want You to Love Me* was not distributed at this time for theatre exhibition at all; it was shown only on television. Shattuc's definition of the discursive frame of the art cinema is arguable. Nevertheless, her main point holds: we may infer from the fact that the popular series was cancelled that *Acht Stunden sind kein Tag* really did begin to 'raise worker consciousness', and was judged by television programmers – precisely because its viewer numbers were so high – as adding more unrest to an already politically turbulent time in West Germany. *I Only Want You to Love Me* can also be, and perhaps was, received by audiences as a consciousness-raising family melodrama; however, for both films in terms of filmic style and detail linked to film content, this perception is ultimately reductionist.

An orientation: elements of the film's plot, style and psychology

Based on an interview from *Lebenslänglich – Protokolle aus der Haft*, *I Only Want You to Love Me* is the story of Trepper's life leading up to his murder of a Munich innkeeper acquaintance who closely resembles his father. The overall narrative frame is set in prison, where inmate Trepper tells his story to his interlocutor in a series of flashbacks, within which are further flashbacks and flashforwards.

Briefly, it concerns Trepper growing up in small-town Catholic Bavaria after World War II, and the emotionally barren, punitive and withholding relationship his parents have with him. Although the film contains only one scene from Peter's childhood, the scene is powerful enough to give a context to the events which follow, when ordered chronologically, and to suggest what must have gone before. As viewers we must work to piece together the chronology of Peter's story from the film's non-linear narrative structure; moreover, early scenes gain meaning only later in the film. For example, Fassbinder often reverses the presentation of cause and effect. The scene from Peter's childhood, in fact, comes after we have already viewed events in Peter's adult life, and the mother's actions towards young Peter are only understandable in retrospect.

In this scene, Peter, dressed in typical Bavarian Lederhosen, brings his mother a bouquet of flowers. A neighbour tells the mother that Peter has stolen the flowers from another neighbour's yard. This can

be understood as Fassbinder's succinct commentary on West German 'neighbourly' relations – spying and informing – which already sets the stage for the erasure of more comprehensive boundaries between private and public life, as well as referring obliquely to the National Socialist past. In a medium shot encompassing the whole family, shot straight on in depth, the father, in the middle ground right, opposite the mother standing on the left, tentatively encourages her to beat Peter, who is bent over a chair between the two and facing the camera. Peter's head hangs down so that we cannot see his face. The mother begins to beat Peter with a wooden coat hanger, while the father moves from the middle ground to the background and slips silently through a doorway, presumably unable to witness physical violence used against his son. The father thus betrays the parents' agreement, exposing it as a brief artifice. His withdrawal occasions such fury in the mother that she beats Peter harder and harder until the hanger breaks on his back. Peter endures this silently, without crying. (Later, his own child, a baby, is seen lying motionless and silent in his wife's arms while Peter and his wife have an argument, which repeats in the next generation the behaviour expected of a 'good' child, an obedient child who does not fuss or cry – in short, an affectless child.)

The punishment focuses on the child's theft as a severe transgression of the sanctity of private property. There is no indication that either parent can understand the gift of flowers to the mother as a sign of Peter's love for her. Besides, how could the child Peter afford to buy his mother flowers? Stealing already indicates, in material terms, Peter's sense of the illegitimacy of his own longing for love.

This scene also partly, though not completely, diminishes the mother's culpability for punishing Peter so severely, since the father collaborates with the mother and then abnegates responsibility for having done so. In addition, we learn later that the father is having an affair, and thus has withdrawn his love from the mother. Our discovery of the father's affair helps us construct the meaning of the mother's fury retrospectively. Her culpability, then, we are led ultimately to interpret, lies in the fact that she punishes the child as a displaced means of taking vengeance on her husband, who is a far more formidable figure than a little boy, as well as being her only financial support.

In a later sequence in the film, we see the mother lying down with a 'sick' headache, which simultaneously expresses the displacement of her own unacknowledged and unfulfilled needs onto her body and demonstrates her unavailability to Peter. Dialogue reinforces other forms of repression in the film: even the angriest and most emotionally charged exchanges, such as that between the parents upon the mother's discovery that the father keeps 'a whore', are uttered in flat tones.

The narcissistically disturbed personality and mise-en-scene

Peter is narcissistically disturbed, alternating between depression and grandiosity, believing that love must be won or bought rather than given or received freely. He tries to win love, equated with narcissistic cathexis, first from his parents, and then from his wife and her grandmother. After Peter marries, motivated by conventional small-town standards, he finds a job in Munich working as a bricklayer for a construction company. He is the perfect worker according to his boss, but never believes he is good enough, which illustrates the depressive aspect of Peter's personality. He gradually gets into unmanageable debt buying expensive gifts for his wife and trying to impress his parents through displays of material achievement, such as taking a taxi to their house all the way from Munich, and attending the Opera, which he can little afford. Such sequences demonstrate his grandiosity as well as his belief that love must be won or bought. These interrelated aspects of Peter's personality are not viable. For example, he cannot pay off his debts, even by holding down two jobs and working overtime.

The psychological motivation for the murder, according to Christian Braad Thomsen, is Peter's 'longing for his father'.⁹ In the murder sequence, which we only see in its entirety near the end of the film, Peter sits at the bar of an inn where he knows the innkeeper, drinking a glass of beer for which he cannot pay. He asks the innkeeper if he may use the telephone. As he picks up the phone to call his father to borrow money, he suddenly cannot remember his father's telephone number. At that moment, an unemployed young man about the same age as Peter enters the inn. After the young man begs the innkeeper for a free beer, the innkeeper angrily throws him out. When Peter sees this, he flies into a rage, beats the innkeeper over the head with the telephone and strangles him with the cord. Thomsen explains the scene in Freudian terms:

The forgetting of the telephone number is an expression of a lack of empathy for the father, and when Peter sees a man who physically *resembles* his father beating a young man (who *could* be Peter), he snaps. A regular identity crisis takes place. He murders the man who reminds him of his father with the same telephone which has already made him conscious of the disrupted connection to his father.¹⁰

That is, Peter lives out what is in the Freudian scenario only a fantasy murder of the father in order to 'achieve unhindered access to the mother'.¹¹ However, after the murder Peter raises the telephone again to beat a woman who has run into the room through an inner doorway. Through a closeup of her face and the reaction closeup shot of Peter's face, it becomes clear that Peter realizes the woman does not look at all like his mother. Still, he says 'Mama!' twice and

9 Christian Braad Thomsen, 'The doubled individual', *Wide Angle*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1990), pp. 60–65, 62.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

11 *Ibid.*

falls at her feet, curled in a foetal position, crying. Peter's actions and words in this series of shots are less expressions of his desire for his mother than, first, his desire to murder his mother and, secondly, his need for her to help him; moreover, the scene reiterates Peter's despair at the fact that his need will once again go unmet. The mother's double remains standing motionless in the doorway above Peter, mirroring the real mother's withholding of love and care for her son. As already mentioned, a fragment of this scene is shown in the middle of the film, in which we see the murder and its aftermath. Only the sequence near the end is complete and allows us to make full psychological meaning of the minimal dialogue, the violent action, and the figures in the *mise-en-scène*, since only at that point are we in possession of the necessary information to interpret the shots.

However, it is precisely the events leading up to the moment of the murder that do not fit with Thomsen's interpretation. Instead, the narrative makes the narcissistic rather than Oedipal structuring of Peter's personality manifest in terms of his almost total lack of parental nurturing and his consequent emotional deficit and lack of 'selfhood', which Peter experiences as a sense of emptiness.

This narcissistic structure can be more specifically defined in terms ultimately alien to Fassbinder's purposes, but which serve to articulate the family melodramas played out and alluded to in the film. Alice Miller, in her early work *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, defined narcissistic disturbance as the result of the child's emerging selfhood having to 'go underground'.¹² Elaborating on and going beyond the object-relations theories of Heinz Kohut, D.W. Winnicott and Margaret Mahler, Miller distinguishes between a 'true self' and a 'false self'. The true self, another way to describe the vitality and spontaneity that give rise to the ability to move beyond subjectifications in deterministic, normative social structures, is the developmental result of the parents' strong abilities to understand and meet their child's needs at any given time. Concerning narcissistic needs, this means the early months of the child's life prior to the separation-individuation stage. Primarily, these needs are for echoing and mirroring. If they are not met, they will resurface at various stages in the child's or adult's life, triggered by external events perceived by the individual's subconscious as resembling those of the original struggle. The false self is another name for the alternating depression and grandiosity resulting from the parents' use of the child to meet their narcissistic needs, unmet in their own childhoods, through any behaviour that makes them unable to mirror and echo the child and be available to the child as a narcissistic object. At last, Miller writes, by becoming parents, adults have someone who is 'completely aware of them, takes them seriously, and who admires and follows them'.¹³

For the child, the consequences of such treatment are grave,

¹² Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child: How Narcissistic Parents Form and Deform the Emotional Lives of their Talented Children*, trans. Ruth Ward (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

14 Ibid., p. 20.

particularly because acknowledging the reality of his or her parents' unavailability at such a vulnerable initial time would have the power to kill the child. Therefore, children hide this knowledge from themselves. However, clinging tendencies, feelings of helplessness and repressed rage against the love object who was not available result from such treatment.¹⁴ Furthermore, people with narcissistic disturbances are never

15 Ibid., p. 21.

taken over by unexpected emotions, and will only admit those feelings that are accepted and approved by their inner censor, which is the parents' heir. Depression and a sense of inner emptiness is the price they must pay for this control.¹⁵

Narcissistic disturbance is rarely acknowledged, since, as Miller continues,

16 Ibid., p. 73.

even the most severe ill-treatment can remain hidden, because of the child's strong tendency to idealization. There is no trial, no advocate, no verdict, everything remains hidden in the darkness of the past, and should the facts be known, then they appear in the name of blessings. If this is so with the crassest examples of physical ill-treatment, then how is mental torment ever to be exposed, when it is less visible and more easily disputed anyway?¹⁶

17 Ibid., p. 21.

The familial origins of narcissism are given context by a social order in which people are rewarded for their achievements, with little understanding of the depression these achievements mask. The true self remains undeveloped and unconscious in what Miller calls its 'inner prison'.¹⁷ As if echoing Miller, who brings the dynamics of the hidden nature of narcissistic disturbance to light in her book, Fassbinder explicitly shows this 'inner prison' early in *I Only Want You to Love Me*. In an in-depth composition, the camera views Peter, his parents, and Erika, Peter's girlfriend (played by Elke Aberle) eating dinner at a table in the father's inn, surrounded by upturned chair legs on the other tables signalling that the inn is closed. In the next shot, the chair legs occupy the entire extreme foreground, 'trapping' the family within them.

18 Ibid., p. 6.

Miller encourages people to resist adaptation in order to change their social fate. She does so by writing her books for lay readers with an emotional rhetoric designed to awaken affects belonging to the 'true self', such as identification, anger, sadness and mourning. Fassbinder, on the other hand, had no such utopianist agenda. Yet it is clear that he and Miller would share one observation, at least: Peter is not so much an aberration as he is an average citizen. Parents' relationships to their own childhood worlds are 'characterized by lack of respect, compulsion to control, and a demand for achievement', Miller writes.¹⁸ In other words, parents treat their children the way they treat the worlds of their own

¹⁹ Miller details the origins of this type of mistreatment of children in her study of German nineteenth and twentieth-century child-pedagogy texts, *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence*, trans. Hildegard and Hunter Hannum (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983).

²⁰ Erffmeyer, 'I Only Want You to Love Me', p. 38.

childhoods.¹⁹ That Peter finally expresses his narcissistic rage – which remains affectively inaccessible to him even after the act of murder – by stepping foul of the law, is perhaps his one deviation from 'average' life.

The overall frame narrative begins with the opening credits of the film in which Peter awakens from a nap in his jail cell. We see him alone at his table eating; the camera tilts upwards to reveal the prison bars on his window. Following this, there is a cut to an emblematic flashback in keeping with the narcissistic text: the adult Peter builds his parents a house. The neighbours see the house as material evidence of filial love. Erika tells him, 'die Leute werden ganz schön neidisch' ('the others in the town will be really envious'), reflecting the importance of appearances. Peter's father boasts about the house to the neighbours and guests at the inn, telling them that his son uses all his free time, including Sundays, to build it. When Peter arrives later at the inn for a dinner his father has offered him, his father instead demands that Peter take over his shift. When Peter does so, his mother chastises him for having dirty fingernails. This boastful pride in appearances and material achievement, as well as the parents' self-absorption, lack of real concern for Peter and the punitive dimension of their behaviour towards him are all tropes of the parents' relationship with Peter throughout the film.

The house has been variously alluded to in plot summaries of the film, but has not been analyzed except at the most superficial level. Erffmeyer, for example, writes that 'as an accomplished brick-layer and construction worker, Peter builds a new house for his parents in which they quickly make him feel unwelcome'.²⁰ More than this, however, we need to ask ourselves what it means to build a house for one's parents when they do not need one and, in any case, could easily afford to buy one for themselves. The child's motivation is his (unacknowledged) bottomless pit of narcissistic need and his (unforeseen) concomitant inability to feel nurtured, since the time when feeling nurtured by echoing and mirroring parents is irrevocably past. In the film, building the house illustrates materially that Peter makes good on the covert parental pact that he live, unquestioningly, for his parents, that they live in and through him, and that he be forbidden to live for himself. It also means that narcissistically disturbed parents need their child's unconditional admiration, which requires continual substantiation, as Miller writes, and that they 'love' their child's achievements, not the child himself. The parents' narcissistic abuse of Peter is illustrated in the two intertitles subsequent to this scene: 'Two weeks after the house was finished his parents seemed to have forgotten it was Peter who had built it', and 'His parents loved him for building them a house for exactly two weeks. Then everything was the same as before.'

Another illustration of the parents' narcissism comes when Erika

urges Peter to ask his father for money, since the couple, now married, do not have enough to make ends meet due to Peter's grandiose spending. Here, we see how his parents punish him for what they perceive as his lack of material achievement, and therefore his unworthiness of their love. When Peter finally does ask, he and Erika receive a little money in the mail. The intertitle reads: 'The money arrived the next day without any greeting, almost like an insult'.

Rigid moral structures are shown as substitutes for vitality in the film's other characters, a sign that narcissistic disturbance is widespread in society and not confined simply to Peter and his family. A sequence conveying this comes when Erika's father waits up for her to arrive home from a date with Peter before they are married. He is seen from a low angle opening the door when she arrives. In closeup, we see him raise an eyebrow in question, saying only 'na?' ('well?'). From a high angle, we see Erika, who has entered the house and descended the steps from the landing, dutifully shaking her head in response. Using only a monosyllable, Fassbinder gives us a visual sequence indicating how the father violates Erika's boundaries; moreover, the father uses his daughter to meet standards and concerns that revolve around Catholic moral dicta and what the neighbours might think if they knew. After her father is called to bed by his wife, Erika stands in the hall still in her coat with a mixture of shame and resignation on her face. This betrays her feeling that her father has violated her sexually, albeit without word or touch, and not for the first time, reflecting an aspect of his ongoing narcissistic abuse of his daughter.

Mise-en-scene also establishes and confirms the narcissistically disturbed relationship that exists between Peter and his mother. The visual relations in the shot after the young Peter brings his mother flowers provide a good example of this. The mise-en-scene is shot as an in-depth static composition. We see Peter's mother in the extreme background scolding him in her usual affectless tone. Peter stands in the foreground, the back of his head to the camera, partly obscured and framed by the stolen flowers and an obsessively neat stack of reflecting drinking glasses in the extreme foreground. In addition, the glasses are on the viewer's left, where the mother also stands (but in the background), associating impenetrable yet reflecting, fastidiously arranged and fragile surfaces with the mother. These surfaces, however, clearly are not used as a metaphor for the child's loving gaze into the eyes of a loving mother who reflects it back; rather, their position at the back of Peter's head while he and we look at his mother's austere face and at her black-clad figure, indicates an already disrupted and warped narcissistic relationship between mother and son. The still-growing, but cut, flowers are associated poignantly and ironically with Peter's potential for blossoming, as well as his continually thwarted and ultimately stunted emotional growth. This

shot, and others like it, are surely indebted to those in Douglas Sirk's 1950s films in terms of the mise-en-scene and in-depth colour compositions.

The relationship between mother and son is restated in similar visual terms throughout the film, although these terms are varied slightly and given more complex meaning as the story progresses. When Peter is an adult, for example, he cares for his mother, suffering from her headache and lying on a couch in the foreground. Peter once again brings his mother flowers, which he lays on the coffee table in front of the couch. With the flowers in the foreground, covering her body up to her pale face and closed eyes, the mother looks as if she is dead, displayed in an open casket, the ultimate picture of affectlessness. The next shot is framed by an ornate mirror through which we witness the action and mise-en-scene, establishing narcissism through the mirror in literal visual terms. After Peter has placed the flowers in a vase on the coffee table, he is seen in the background, while in the foreground a water pitcher with floral decorations, opposite a porcelain statue of the Madonna and Child, sits on a table in front of the mirror. Peter's movement from background to foreground, viewing his own image in the framing mirror, corresponds perfectly to the spatial arrangement of the objects in the frame. The floral decorations are lifeless flowers, now associated unambiguously with Peter's own affectlessness. Moreover, the fact that Peter tends to his mother reverses the relationship of mother and child expressed by the statue, which both symbolizes the nurtured, holy child and the coming adult's holy sacrifice – here, the icon is linked ironically to Peter as an *unnurtured child* and straightforwardly to Peter's literal self-sacrifice. Although Peter stares intently at the entire scene (and himself) reflected in the mirror, he has no relation to his true self and therefore cannot make sense of what he sees; this image perhaps also contains an ironic reference to Narcissus in love with his own reflection.

The West German context: consumer capitalism and the postwar generation

Clearly, *I Only Want You to Love Me* can be read in terms of the close detailing of an individual's narcissistic disorder and its origins and development in the individual's family, with hints at the complicity of neighbours in supporting this type of abuse as well as at the narcissistic disturbances in other families, such as Erika's. All of this detailing brings us closer to understanding narcissism as a social disorder.

That Fassbinder works out these various relations visually by using a wealth of material objects as metaphors for narcissism appears to

prove Freud's statement in a letter to Karl Abraham after Freud had viewed G.W. Pabst's Hollywood film, *Secrets of a Soul* (1925), that 'my chief objection is still that I do not believe that satisfactory plastic representation of my abstractions is at all possible. I do not want to give my consent to anything insipid.' It is not my intention to join the long-standing debate among artists and filmmakers about whether or not psychic abstractions and flows of desire can really be captured in representation. I quote Freud in order to show that Fassbinder not only uses material objects in the mise-en-scene to stand as metaphors for psychic processes (which Freud might have found 'insipid'), but uses them to excess precisely to establish the excessive materialistic orientation of narcissistic disturbance in a particular time and place. In other words, he links Peter's disturbed personality so intimately to West German consumerism and the demand for material achievement, which was the legacy of the Economic Miracle, that it is difficult to state definitively that the film depicts purely familial, individualistic psychological causation.

At this time, West Germany had seen the end of the Economic Miracle of the late 1940s and 1950s, the flourishing of which Ludwig Erhard, Adenauer's Economics Minister, helped create and oversee in his call for 'smaller government'. Erhard himself, as head of the Christian Democratic Party, governed Germany for a short time until just before the economic recession of 1966–7. His government was followed by the Grand Coalition government of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats (the CDU and the SPD), with Kurt Kiesinger as Chancellor. After the recession, the Grand Coalition government advocated a neo-Keynesian economic strategy including tax reforms and heavy State investments in the economic infrastructure. In 1967, for example, a law was passed called the Law for the Stabilization of the Economy and Promotion of Economic Growth, which advocated State intervention in the economy. In addition, the State attempted to facilitate viable relations between employers and workers. In 1969, the Kiesinger government gave way to a Coalition government led by the Social Democrats with the Free Democrats, headed by Willi Brandt as Chancellor. Trepper's adult married life and his murder of the innkeeper take place during this brief period when employment, consumerism and corporate capitalism rose, aided by State investments in the West German economy. Subsequently, the Brandt era of the 1970s had to fight widespread unemployment and severe economic recessions, partly the legacies of these 1960s policies (and later the consequence of the global recession linked to the oil crisis), ultimately through crisis management. Fassbinder shows the status of worker and consumer life both latent and manifest in the society of the mid-to-late 1960s: on the one hand he presents the unemployment to come through the appearance of the young man in the inn who resembles Peter; on the other he shows the complications of consumerism

which at the time involved economic policies that extended credit to workers. We see disproportionately lengthy sequences in which Peter and Erika shop in boutiques and department stores, sign credit statements and instalment payment documents, pay the bailiff so he will not order the removal of Peter and Erika's belongings, and so on. In addition, Fassbinder devotes much attention to exactly how much things cost – 685 marks for a gold bracelet, 200 marks for a dress, 978 marks for a knitting machine – and to the precise terms for receiving credit, making down payments and monthly instalments. Through such scenes, Fassbinder connects narcissism to consumer capitalism directly by establishing commerce and its attendant documents as a means of winning love through goods immediately received, with the stipulation that these goods require long-term payment plans and, as such, become 'investments' in long-term love. Peter cannot resist this ideology.

Erffmeyer writes that while nineteenth-century melodramas often addressed the tensions between the workplace and the domestic sphere, rarely did Hollywood melodramas in the 1940s and 1950s address these tensions explicitly. Owing a great deal in his films to his knowledge of Hollywood melodramas, Fassbinder drew from these melodramas many of their implicit, ambiguous elements which he then made explicit and relentlessly pushed to unambiguous extremes. In fact, this is a hallmark of Fassbinder's 1970s melodramas. Erffmeyer writes that Fassbinder raises the issue of workplace and domestic tensions for examination in *I Only Want You to Love Me*. The film focuses, for example, often and meticulously on economics in the domestic sphere – the prices of furniture and other household items, seen when Peter and Erika set up house in their new apartment in Munich.

More than this, however, the boundary between public and private becomes blurred, even erased entirely, as Fassbinder fixates on how economic factors determine and subjectify human relationships in general. In a key scene, Erika and Peter discuss their finances and purchases as the camera follows them through a public garden and into a greenhouse. They are so intent on their conversation that they notice nothing of their surroundings, nor do they look at each other. In addition, the camera follows them from shot to shot from all sides in medium closeups or long shots, suggesting the ubiquitousness of the subject that dominates and determines their relationship to each other. The couple is characterized in similar terms throughout their married life together, scrupulously going over their strained household budget, allotting so much for rent, for instalment payments on kitchen appliances, furniture, the television, and newspaper and magazine subscriptions, for example. The whole of their interaction and communication is governed by how to manage their lives together financially as well as by how each reacts to this management. Peter spends money he does not have and cannot earn

nervously and compulsively; Erika is dominated by fears that the couple won't be able to manage. Again, Peter's spending is driven by his narcissistic disturbance. He buys objects for Erika in order to win her love which, for Peter, requires continual substantiation.

Erffmeyer focuses intensively on the financial arrangements defining the couple's relationship in the film, and is therefore not predisposed to understand the emotional logic of Peter's progressive debilitation, which is linked to his narcissistic disturbance reinforced and triggered by the easy availability of goods and credit, as the film proceeds:

Inexplicably, Peter stops going to his job and spends his days aimlessly riding the subways. One day, again for no apparent reason, Peter buys a handgun from a decorative store display.²¹

21 Ibid., p. 39.

But clearly, Peter deteriorates on account of an adult life composed of spending, buying and overwork, as he attempts to meet the debts which spin more and more wildly out of control. Overspending, overbuying and overwork do not meet his need for love. They also illustrate that Peter is, according to his felt but inarticulate perception of himself, unworthy of love, a (self) sacrifice, and in the context of consumerism, a 'throw-away' self. Consumer capitalism, then, exacerbates Peter's underlying narcissistic rage and emptiness, first expressed in depressive self-loathing and then in a homicide directed at a man who stands in for the father who victimized him. Peter practices pointing the gun at his own reflection in the hall mirror in his apartment, once again without being able to understand what or whom he sees, and finally murders the innkeeper.

It is clear that the narcissistically disturbed family creates a consumerist mentality in its offspring through an economics of love. Further, Fassbinder draws the West German economic sphere into the most intimate aspects of family life in such a way that the general consumerist mentality of postwar West Germans is shown to trigger narcissistically disturbed behaviours. More than this, consumerism ultimately subjectifies family relationships in this generation, as we have seen in Peter and Erika's relationship. Trepper's 'case' indicates at least that family relationships and consumer capitalism determine and feed into each other.

In the background: the postwar West German context

There is no endless regress to narcissism in this film, a criticism often levelled at individualistic psychological theories. Fassbinder draws the line at the war generation. The continuities between National Socialist economic goals and the Economic Miracle lie in the background of the film. Even before the currency reform in 1948, the West German economy began to grow at a phenomenal rate. The

official Economic Miracle of the 1950s included Erhard's policies of low taxes, high interest rates and profits, low wage increases for workers, a squeeze on domestic credit and the encouragement of investment, all of which contributed to the expansion of the economy but also to an increasing gap between rich and poor, so that by the 1960s a small segment of the society held a great proportion of the wealth, contributing greatly to the financial problems of the working class in the postwar generation. West Germany of the 1950s also experienced full western integration as a founding member of the European Economic Community (EEC) in the Treaty of Rome (1957) and other organizations, such as NATO (1955) and the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC, 1951). Related to western integration, West Germany's remarkable economic recovery gave rise to a materialistic society with huge rates of growth and productivity, which could not continue given, in part, the consequent imbalance in the distribution of wealth. We see the unequal distribution of wealth along the lines of the two generations of West Germans, through Peter's father's financial successes and Peter's futile longing to 'live up' to those successes. For example, Peter, standing in line to deposit money at the bank, glances in a point-of-view shot at a closeup of the hand and wrist of an older woman in line in front of him. The woman wears an expensive gold bracelet. Instead of depositing his wages, Peter rushes to a jewellery store and buys Erika a similar gold bracelet, using almost the entire amount to do so.

By collectively repressing the past and focusing on building a prosperous future, Konrad Adenauer's Christian Democratic West Germany easily integrated former Nazis into both State and private economic sectors. In the private sector, former Nazis became powerful, successful corporate executives, to which *Deutschland im Herbst/Germany in Autumn* (1978) also attests. Corporations such as Siemens, Volkswagen and Springer, among others, continued their National Socialist successes unchecked. In an important scene, just before Peter's parents move into the house Peter has built for them, his mother complains of having to serve 'drunks' all the time. The father responds, 'In four or five weeks we will have made it'. In the next sequence, Erika and Peter visit the parents at the new house and ask if the father will now open another inn. He responds, 'You wouldn't understand even if I explained it, but let's say [I will open] something like a regional agency'. Later in the film, he enters the dining room where the family is gathered, rubbing his hands together and announcing that he has just successfully completed a phone transaction with an important client. While it is never stated what the father's new position is, he has clearly moved from the serving class to the upper middle class with enough money to open his 'regional concern'. Peter, through his bricklaying skills, has aided him in doing so, sparing his father from having to buy a new house.

To generalize, the postwar generation, victims of their parents'

refusal to confront the horrors the older generation implicitly condoned because of the ease with which the war generation could secure money and position, were therefore unable to resist the rise of consumer capitalism. Peter buys and buys. The difference between the two generations is that the father is a persecutor and Peter a victim, which also evidently reflects, for Fassbinder, the difference between the two generations of 'ordinary' West Germans. However, because of the ceaseless collective/individual repression of history rooted in the denial of National Socialism and its horrors, linked to the ideology and success of the Economic Miracle, the roles of persecutor and victim will be interchangeable and repeat themselves; on this level, too, it is no surprise that Peter's rage finally emerges and he becomes a murderer, nor that his child is empty of emotional affect, even as a baby.

Film style and a critique of determinism

Fassbinder uses architecture, objects in domestic and public spaces, and mirrors to frame and reflect the inner lives of the figures in the film as well as to demonstrate a materialistic orientation within narcissistic disturbance through the use of a wide range of material objects. These visual techniques serve to create meaning in fairly conventional and democratic filmic terms, linking the various familial, social and economic subjectifications that determine Peter's life course.

However, in an odd scene Fassbinder disjoins sound and sight. *Peter and his foreman talk while at the construction site. As they speak to each other, the camera does not engage in typical shot/reverse-shot (in fact, there are few such shots in the film), but cuts back and forth between a medium closeup two-shot and a medium long shot of the construction site – which can be seen as evidence of continuing to rebuild West Germany along the lines of State-facilitated corporate capitalism. At first the soundtrack is simply diegetic, composed of the 'natural' noise of construction machines. This noise gradually grows louder and louder, for no apparent diegetic reason, ultimately drowning out the men's voices. The noise itself is finally replaced by the extra-diegetic sound of dogs barking. Then the shot fades to black. It would be banal to liken Peter and his boss to dogs at this point, even though the film has made use of visual and sound techniques to reflect and deepen our understanding of processes of subjectification. Just as Fassbinder uses visual metaphors to express the subjectification of individuals and West German society at this time, he for the most part employs sound conventionally – to heighten suspense and to accentuate the 'climax' of the murder with discordant music. A lack of music in crucial scenes also emphasizes the affectively repressed, 'empty'*

relationships between characters. By disjoining sound and sight, then, Fassbinder creates a 'singularity' within the film, an affect that escapes deterministic schemes of meaning. Why this disjunction, which arises from nowhere as an aporia in an otherwise apparently naturalistic visual and aural narrative composition? At this moment in the film, the elements of sound composition dissolve into noise and resolve into barking, creating non-sense between sound and sight. This aporia, construed in the context of the film up to this point, exhibits the singularities at work in filmic composition and, by extrapolation, in the narratives of subjectification, which before this have been treated deterministically. In other words, there is no essential, necessary connection between the elements of film composition, nor between those elements and the representations they stage. Moreover, this gap creates an absolute contingency of relations and therefore a moment in which determinism is shown to be fundamentally non-deterministic, a collection of singularities only interpreted from the point of view of constructing a coherent whole.

It is an anarchic moment. Not just the film, but the processes it describes, could all be done otherwise, Fassbinder suggests. This anarchic moment is almost immediately closed over, implying that complicities between various orders of subjectification, of which the film itself is a part, cannot be disentangled; they can, however, be understood as arbitrary at base. The determinism of the relations staged in the film resumes after the fade-out as the film continues faithfully, that is, conventionally, recording Peter's life in a naturalistic-seeming narrative.

Life interpretations: a West German leftist political agenda in the 1960s and 1970s media

I Only Want You to Love Me ultimately undercuts the kind of naturalism we expect from a psychological made-for-television docudrama through its manipulation of vision and sense, calling for an interpretation based less on Peter retelling his life story to his visitor in prison by means of naturalistic flashbacks and flashforwards and more on commentary far beyond Peter's apparently absent critical abilities, proven in scene after scene. To reiterate, stylistically, the film makes use of flashback and flashforward techniques common to the television genre in order to piece together a chronological story that accumulates sense by means of a non-linear, fragmented narrative style. Ordinarily, these techniques in television films are fairly simple. Fassbinder certainly uses them to make visible to viewers the past 'hidden in darkness'. But his use of these techniques is intricate. Within the overall frame narrative in the present (a typical framing convention), he often shoots very short takes. For example, within a flashback from prison, he flashforwards

to the aftermath of the murder of the innkeeper, which lasts only seconds, and comes before we even 'get to know' Peter's father, therefore before the murder can begin to make sense to us. In the same shot, the motionless woman in the doorway can only acquire meaning as the various non-chronological fragments of Peter's relationship with his parents are presented to us. We are tempted by Fassbinder's particular use of these techniques to understand the fragmentary narrative as the way a patient in therapy remembers events and focuses on the transgression, which in this case, occasions the memories that brought him to prison therapy in the first place. In addition, since Peter seems to have no critical abilities of his own, there must be another interpreting psyche at work in the film, and indeed there is, ascribed to the Erika Runge character visiting Peter in prison. We meet her shortly after Peter awakens and presumably remembers building his parents the house, bringing flowers to his mother as a child and being beaten for doing so. Yet Runge's is the authoritative 'voice' of the film. We see her five times during the course of the film, sitting across from Peter at the visiting room table and asking him questions. It can be assumed that these questions are all asked on the same day, since she wears the same dress throughout. This piece of visual information begins to skew our view of Runge's role as prison psychologist, since the questions are intensive and wide-ranging, too much so for one therapy session. The five sequences in the frame narrative with Runge are shot almost identically: first, we see a medium closeup of the back of Runge's head and shoulders as she asks Peter a question. Her back and shoulders almost completely obscure Peter's face. While he answers her, the camera slowly travels right and moves in to a medium closeup of Peter, so that most of his responses are not visually obscured by Runge. Then Fassbinder cuts to a closeup side view of Runge's face looking down, then to Peter speaking, and back to a closeup of Runge shot straight on with a sympathetic smile on her face as she silently encourages Peter to speak. An example of the dialogue that takes place between the two serves as an emblem for all their dialogue – the counterpart to the emblematic visual terms of their encounter – throughout most of the film until the very end, when Runge's actual role is exposed, and we can retrospectively construct Fassbinder's critique of a West German leftist agenda. Fassbinder cuts from Peter's flashback to his mother beating him with a coat hanger back to Runge:

Runge: Did you have the feeling that your mother really loved you?

Peter (in fragmented sentences, stopping and starting): I used to be sure that she loved me a little, then I doubted it, but I think so.

Runge: Were you afraid of your parents or didn't you have those kinds of feelings or have you forgotten?

Peter: When I was small I wouldn't say afraid . . . I liked being at home.

Runge: What kind of child were you? Would you say you were a good child, or a child who . . .

Peter: I was very good.

The sequence then cuts away to the adult Peter bringing his ailing mother flowers.

Protokolle, a word that came to refer to transcribed interviews with ordinary people in West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s, were intended to allow silenced voices to speak. As such, they came to be a political force on the Left in West Germany. Some, though by no means all, West German viewers would have recognized Erika Runge, Peter's interviewer in prison, who is unnamed in the film. Runge's television film, *Bottroper Protokolle/Interviews from Bottrop* (1968), is the story of working-class life in a small town in the Ruhr district, among people hard-hit by pit closures and rehousing schemes. It both evokes the vanishing traces of working-class culture and condemns the State and corporate decisions that ruined the working class in Bottrop. *Bottroper Protokolle* made Runge famous and became, along with some of her other work, the standard for the interview film. For many West German audiences, then, Runge's role in *I Only Want You to Love Me* probably would have been identified with that of an interviewer taping a *Protokoll* and not, as for audiences unfamiliar with Runge's political positions and film reputation, with that of a prison psychologist, or at least would have raised doubts about her role.

Runge's character may be unnamed in the film because she may represent Christiane Ehrhardt, one of the interviewers and editors of *Lebenslänglich*, the book on which Fassbinder based his film script. This may be the case because Fassbinder ultimately presents not only an unflattering view of this character, but an extensive critique of the leftist project of *Protokollierung*.

Lebenslänglich as an object, published as number 17 in the *Reihe Roter Schnitt* (Red Edge Series) of Munich's Piper Press, one of Germany's most well known and successful publishing houses, is interesting in itself: the edge of each page is red, visually indicating the leftist agenda of the series. We can usefully contrast this commodification of an agenda with any *Goldschnitt* series, widely available, in which book pages are edged in 'gold', usually signifying canonical texts, as with the US Great Books series. The Great Books series is aimed at the middle classes as a symbol of aristocracy, with its origins in popular American images of private, usually British, libraries in castles, country homes and city apartments belonging to the upper classes. In the case of the *Reihe Roter Schnitt*, in which books visually displayed their political content even before they were opened, the target readers were

leftists, which at the time of the series' publication formed a significant portion of West Germany's readership. Piper saw and took the opportunity to target leftists through this particular marketing strategy. To generalize, class distinctions and the political messages that texts convey, among other factors, clearly have shrewdly thought-out commodity dimensions. Fassbinder treats one interview, the interview with Peter Trepper from number 17 of the *Reihe Roter Schnitt*, ironically in his script and the mise-en-scene relating to Runge's character and her attitude towards Peter; more overtly, he criticizes immanently this leftist political agenda's complicity in commodification and its ultimate fate (and/or goal?) to produce consumer items.

If Runge's character had been a psychologist, Peter perhaps would have been offered a way out of his inner prison, if not out of prison itself. By the end of the film, however, Fassbinder leaves no more room for ambiguity: Runge's character is revealed as an interviewer listening to Peter's history and interpreting it along the way for the purpose of *Protokollierung*, in this case, the process of interviewing prisoners in order to help effect structural change by making their lives legible, held up as examples of victimization in familial, economic, political and social systems. Even so, Runge's character becomes part of the trap in which Peter is caught, even if her political goals are not self-serving. Near the end of the film, Peter tells her he is aware that her sole interest in him is to gather material so she can sell her book. Even if Peter is wrong, he remains the tool for someone else's objectives, narcissistically used yet again. At the very least, Runge's character cannot side with him, since her interests may be divided, if not conflicting. There is evidence, though, that Fassbinder is not as generous about this point as I am here: Runge's intimate questions, coupled with her role as the writer of a *Protokoll*, suggest that she maintains a protective distance from her interviewee which effectively prevents her identification with him, a process that would be crucial to therapy; in addition, she is not compelled to stay at the prison even for the length of a working day, and can leave or arrive at any time during visiting hours. We can surmise that her role also serves to keep Peter distanced from her. It helps prove that Peter has, in Miller's words, 'no advocate'.²² Moreover, the lack of any closeness between the two suggests that Peter performs as Runge's character wishes him to, just as he has performed all along for his emotionally distant parents.

The interview Runge's character will write down will become another commodity. Thus, Peter's life story is commodified. Fassbinder builds this insight into the film itself *qua* commodity, offering an immanent critique of the status of his own film in addition to the *Protokoll* on which it is based. *I Only Want You to Love Me* thus attains the status of a commodity based on another commodity, the 'true story' of Trepper's life. More precisely,

²² Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, p. 73.

Fassbinder uses the requirements and conventions of the docudrama based on a *Protokoll* and astutely criticizes them at the same time, realizing fully the commodity and consumer status of his filmic 'true story' based on his own script, which in turn is based on the written 'true story' of the interviewed 'true story' pieced together and interpreted by the interviewer from a suffering person's real life.

If no room is available in the complicities of social and economic life for the anarchy of singularities to extend beyond a moment (even if they always 'in-tend' in every moment), then there is certainly no room for utopianist visions of social change – which try to leap over these complicities only to be trapped in them without seeing the trap – of which Fassbinder judges the political act of *Protokollierung* to be a part. The fact that Runge appears more or less as herself (and agreed to do so) in this film deepens this immanent critique. Even if fundamentally arbitrary, social determinism, with its economic complications, is inescapable and, as Fassbinder suggests, incontrovertible, except between the narrow margins of an immanent critique, which offers only the slightest notion that orders of subjectification do not have to be the way they are.

After the full presentation of the murder sequence, we hear the judge, in voiceover, sentencing Peter to ten years in prison, during which we see a series of blank red frames and a repetition of the intertitle, 'His parents loved him for building them a house for exactly two weeks. Then everything was the same as before.' Then, Fassbinder cuts to the frame narrative. The film ends in a series of freeze-frames over which the credits roll, broken by continued action. In response to Runge's question, 'And when you killed the innkeeper, what did you feel?', Peter falters and says, 'it was me and yet I am not like that. . . .' He rises and says, 'I don't want to say any more. You'll write your book and go off and earn money. Will you please let me go now?' Runge asks Peter a final question sitting at the table, her back to the camera as we see Peter standing at the other end of the table in a medium shot: 'You, yourself, are you glad to be alive?' Peter's rage rises as he looks at her as if she were crazy and begins to walk from the room. The question is repeated twice more, extra-diegetically, like a broken record, throughout the stop-and-go action.

This question is oddly timed. It implies that Runge's interest from the start has never been in Peter himself, that is, in his wishes and longings, but in getting on with her *Protokoll*, which has all along followed a political agenda. Why is this her last question and not her first, for example? Moreover, this last scene lends deeper meaning retrospectively to the disjunction of vision and sound at the construction site: now we can also hear (Fassbinder's) cynical laughter (barking) at the *Protokoll*, which to Fassbinder is a life story solicited by the interviewer and patly fashioned into the hackneyed tale of the 'unconscious victim' of systems that shape him into a

murderer. It also suggests laughter at his own film inasmuch as it has been up to this point the faithful visual and aural transcription of the *Protokollierung* of Peter Trepper.

That Peter cannot answer Runge's questions throughout the frame narrative either because he stutters, falters and speaks in incomplete sentences, or only answers them in terms of his past with his parents seen, in Miller's words, as a 'blessing', seems to mark definitively Runge's function as the interpreting voice and psyche of the events of Peter's life as presented throughout the film. Yet ambiguity remains: we do not know if Peter's initial memories from his cell, which are unmediated by Runge, are his own interpretations or if we can presume that Runge has already begun her *Protokoll* at this point. Less ambiguous is the fact that Peter refuses to answer her last questions. Until this point, we have seen Peter repeatedly characterized as having an affectless relation to his 'true self'. We see this emptiness and its underlying rage ultimately also in the narrative frame, the narrative present of the film. The exposure of Runge's role marks the loss of any leftover hope audiences may have had for the amelioration of Peter's suffering. Most importantly, however, we now know that Peter is aware that he has been mercilessly used, at the very least with regard to Runge and her book; this kind of critical awareness is significantly absent from the preceding narrative of his life. This last of Fassbinder's insights implies that Runge has condescended to and patronized Peter throughout the narrative that occurred before the final scene. The fact that Peter comes from a serving-class background and is himself a member of the working class, yet could possess acute insights into the processes of his own subjectification, apparently does not fit with Runge's view of a working-class murderer, even though she styles herself as the voice and representative for the working class in her political work. For her, Peter is simply the inarticulate victim of systemic forces.

In all these ways, Fassbinder's film subsumes strategies of resistance – anarchism, and, at the end of the film, the political goals of *Protokollierung* – under determinism, as he links up the narcissistic subjectification of the individual, consumerism and postwar West German economic history. These connections, or complicities, result in a complete shut-down of individual and collective affects. On this level, psychotherapeutic means of transformation become absurd: they would provide no way out even if they were offered, for what good is 'selfhood', in Miller's positive sense of the word, as a source for resistance, when that selfhood is made to be completely unavailable, individually and collectively? There is no way out for Peter, nor for any of the characters in the film, for that matter, including his interviewer. The individual is trapped, affective abilities and capacities severely diminished, in overdetermined processes of subjectification.

I Only Want You to Love Me offers no hope for individual or structural change; rather, it goes well beyond the terms of former West German leftist docudramas aired on television. In fact, in the 1960s and 1970s these docudramas, as well as television documentaries, were contextualized by panel discussions between 'experts' such as sociologists, psychologists, economists and others, introduced before television screenings by a moderator. The films were then analyzed by these experts either during a break in presentation or immediately following presentation, so that whatever political force could have emerged from a direct confrontation with the films was effectively dismissed. Erika Runge herself strongly protested about this television policy, which was a further form of commodifying her work. A direct confrontation with *I Only Want You to Love Me* offers viewers the experience of complex and acutely framed complicities – working ultimately to commodify individuals, specifically, although not necessarily exclusively, in late 1960s West Germany – between familial, social, economic, literary, political and filmic orders, including the television film itself as a consumer commodity.

reports and debates

debate:

Crash and film censorship in the UK

ANNETTE KUHN

¹ *Screen*, vol. 39, no. 2 (1998), pp. 165–92; vol. 40, no. 2 (1999), pp. 193–202.

Rounding off the critical debates on *Crash* (David Cronenberg, 1996) published in recent issues of *Screen*,¹ the following is a brief chronology of, and commentary upon, the controversy over the film which raged in Britain between May 1996, when it won a prize at the Cannes Film Festival, and its UK general release more than a year later.

May 1996 *Crash* wins the Special Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, where it arouses some controversy. Moves to suppress the film are anticipated in festival reports in the British press (*Sunday Times*, 12 May; *Sunday Telegraph*, 19 May).

June On 3 June, London *Evening Standard* film critic Alexander Walker condemns *Crash* in an article headlined 'A movie beyond the bounds of depravity' (*Evening Standard*, 3 June), but does not openly demand that it be censored: '*Crash* . . . will tax public tolerance and film censorship to the limits, and maybe beyond them'. Suggestions that the film might be banned or cut appear also in the broadsheet press (*Independent on Sunday*, 16 June).

August The film still has no UK distributor, and is not shown

in full at the Edinburgh Film Festival (*Daily Telegraph*, 15 August).

- September It is announced that *Crash* will be screened at the London Film Festival in November (*Evening Standard*, 26 September).
- Autumn Reported dates of the film's submission to the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) range from early October (*Times*, 9 November) to the first week of November (*Daily Telegraph*, 8 November).
- November A 'special' certificate is granted for the LFF screening on 8 November: this goes ahead with the director present, and is followed by a call to 'Ban This Car Crash Sex Film' from the *Daily Mail* (9 November). On 9 November it is reported that Heritage Secretary Virginia Bottomley is urging local cinema licensing authorities to use their powers to ban the film if the BBFC fails to do so, and that the Board has been approached by her department (*Daily Telegraph*, 9 November; *Guardian*, 9 November). Westminster City Council declares its intention to view the film, and on 20 November imposes an interim ban pending the BBFC's ruling (*Independent*, 10 November; *Times*, 21 November). The *Evening Standard* suggests that the BBFC be placed under Home Office supervision (22 November). Columbia TriStar has by now taken on distribution of *Crash*, and announces its intention to release the film in late January 1997. The *Guardian* attributes the outrage to electioneering on the part of supporters of the ruling Conservative Party in the runup to a General Election (12 November).
- December On 13 December, the BBFC allegedly submits a report to the Home Office, compiled at the request of Home Secretary Michael Howard (*Sight and Sound*, July 1997). According to the *Guardian*, on 22 December BBFC examiners recommend that *Crash* be passed '18', with cuts (23 December); however, a *Sunday Times* report suggests that the BBFC is merely considering recommending a cut version of the film, and will make its final decision in early January (*Sunday Times*, 22 December).
- January 1997 In a letter to *New Statesman*, the BBFC denies having passed a cut version (24 January). At the end of the

month, the film remains under consideration (*Guardian*, 31 January).

- March On 18 March, having consulted a forensic pathologist, a QC and a group of disabled people, and after a meeting earlier in the month with the Home Secretary, the BBFC passes the film '18', without cuts (*Times*, 19 March; *Independent*, 19 March; *Daily Telegraph*, 19 March; *Evening Standard*, 24 March). A report that Westminster City Council is reviewing its decision appears on the following day (*Guardian*, 19 March), but its ban remains in place.
- May A general election on 1 May results in a landslide victory for Labour. *Index on Censorship* (vol. 26, no. 3) reports that forty local councils asked for screenings of *Crash* before deciding whether to permit its release in their areas. Meanwhile, the Westminster ban continues. North Lanarkshire is the only other local licensing authority to have banned the film (*Daily Telegraph*, 22 May; *Observer*, 25 May).
- June *Crash* goes on general release on 6 June, with distributor TriStar releasing it onto a 'ring of screens' around Westminster (*Independent*, 3 June).

January 1998 *Crash* is certificated for video release.

While at its height it might have looked as if the furore surrounding *Crash* was generated by a press campaign against the film, hindsight suggests that it had as much if not more to do with the uniquely complex relationship obtaining in Britain between local and national government and instruments of film regulation. In brief, the British Board of Film Classification (founded in 1913 as the British Board of Film Censors) has never had legal powers to censor films: under various pieces of legislation stemming from the founding Cinematograph Act of 1909, this power rests with local authorities as part of their responsibility for licensing cinema buildings. Strictly speaking, as a non-government organization, the BBFC can only offer advice to local cinema licensing authorities on the regulation of the contents of films shown in cinemas in their areas.

In practice, however, since the 1920s local licensing authorities have been content to delegate this work to the BBFC, and the Home Office (the government department responsible for administering the Cinematograph Act) has been content to take a back seat, thus avoiding parliamentary accountability and public scrutiny. Only occasionally during the past seventy years or so have 'controversial'

films occasioned open rifts between the three parties. This is largely because responsibility for acts of censorship could be shuffled between the BBFC and local licensing authorities, with central government maintaining its arms' length stance. 'Controversial' films tend to cause open trouble only where other factors are involved: when there is uncertainty about the respective powers of, and lines of communication between, government, licensing authorities and BBFC, perhaps, or at times of rapid social change or shifts in attitudes towards, or behaviour around, moral issues.

Until relatively recently, whenever the BBFC has been uncertain as to what might or might not prove acceptable on the cinema screen, it could test the water and divert any potential flak by in effect leaving it up to local licensing authorities to step in and make decisions on 'controversial' films. For instance, during John Trevelyan's high-profile reign as BBFC Secretary, Joseph Strick's adaptation of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1967), in which the word 'fuck' was uttered for the first time on the British screen, and *The Killing of Sister George* (1969), with its theme of lesbianism, were among a number of films subjected to this treatment. In particular, during these years, the Greater London Council (GLC) – with hundreds of first-run cinemas within its area arguably Britain's most powerful local licensing authority – could usually be relied upon to take a 'permissive' stance: if the GLC would certificate a controversial film and so allow it to be screened in London, public reaction could be put to the test and any negative fallout diverted away from the BBFC.

When the Labour-led GLC was abolished by the Conservative government in 1986, cinema licensing powers became devolved to the capital's patchwork of separate local authorities, and the BBFC lost this key line of defence. By this time, however, the Board had acquired significant new powers as the authority legally responsible for the classification of films on video. As a consequence, its continuing 'voluntary' role in the regulation of cinema films had become a small part of its overall operation, while the emphasis, for films as for videos, was now more firmly on classification by negotiation with producers than on censorship by fiat. In these circumstances it has been possible, or necessary, for the Board to deal with 'difficult' cinema films (Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* [1994] is a case in point) by delaying decisions on classification until controversy dies away.

The lengthy delay in certifying *Crash* took place in largely unprecedented circumstances. It has been rare for a government minister to become embroiled in censorship controversies to the extent of publicly calling for a ban on a particular film; and in the post-GLC era, the BBFC could not rely on a permissive local licensing authority to offer an alternative course of action. The hints at behind-the-scenes Home Office involvement in the *Crash* affair are

intriguing: were officials, as the long history of government's arms' length relationship with film censorship would suggest, wheeled in to undo the damage caused by the precipitate outburst of Virginia Bottomley, minister of another, less powerful, department?

It is clear, however, that Westminster City Council – one of a handful of devolved post-GLC London authorities vociferous in endorsing the Thatcherite agenda – was bound to take a far from libertarian stance in artistic matters, especially once given the green light by Bottomley. And because Westminster's bailiwick covers London's West End and its numerous first-release cinemas, the Council can readily make its voice heard in controversies around film censorship. Consequently, Westminster's attempt to pre-empt the BBFC by threatening to invoke its own legal powers of censorship was bound to hit the headlines – and force the Board to run for cover. In effect the BBFC fell back on its established strategy of waiting – in this case sitting out the last weeks of an exhausted administration, with a news agenda dominated by an imminent general election – to certificate the film, and so to pave the way for its British release within weeks of a change of government. With the Westminster ban still in place, *Crash* cheekily made its first London (and UK) public appearance in cinemas in the neighbouring, Labour-led, local authority of Camden: 'The film . . . will open . . . at the ABC Shaftesbury Avenue, just yards from Leicester Square, the hub of London cinema' (*Independent*, 25 May).

Additional sources:

Mark Kermode and Julian Petley, 'Road rage', *Sight and Sound* (June 1997).

Tom Dewe Mathews, *Censored* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994).

Julian Petley, 'No redress from the PCC', *British Journalism Review*, vol. 8, no. 4 (1997).

Researching the reception of indigenous affairs in Australia

'The Reporting and Reception of Indigenous Issues in the Australian Media' was a three-year project financed by the Australian government through its Australian Research Council Large Grants Scheme and run by Professor John Hartley (of Murdoch and then Edith Cowan Universities, Western Australia). The purpose of the research was to map the ways in which 'indigeneity' is constructed and circulated in Australia's mediasphere.

The 'reporting' element of the project was straightforward: a mixture of content analysis of a large number of items in the media, and detailed textual analysis of a smaller number of key texts. The discoveries were interesting – that when analysis approaches the media as a whole, rather than focusing exclusively on news or serious drama genres, then representation of indigeneity is not nearly as homogenous as has previously been assumed. And if researchers do not explicitly set out to uncover racism in every text, it is by no means guaranteed they will find it.¹

The question of how to approach the 'reception' of these issues – and particularly reception by indigenous Australians – proved to be far more challenging. In attempting to research this area, Hartley and I (as a research assistant on the project) often found ourselves hampered by the axioms that underlie much media research.

Traditionally, the 'reception' of media by indigenous people in Australia has been researched in ethnographic ways. This research repeatedly discovers that indigenous people in Australia are powerless in the face of new forms of media. Indigenous populations are represented as victims of aggressive and powerful intrusions: 'What happens when a remote community is suddenly inundated by broadcast TV?';

'Overnight they will go from having no radio and television to being bombarded by three TV channels'; 'The influence of film in an isolated, traditionally oriented Aboriginal community'.² This language of 'influence', 'bombarded' and 'inundated' presents metaphors not just of war but of a war being lost. It tells of an unequal struggle, of a more powerful force impinging upon a weaker one. What else could be the relationship of an Aboriginal audience to something which is 'bombarding' them? Or by which they are 'inundated'?

This attitude might best be summed up by the title of an article by Elihu Katz: 'Can authentic cultures survive new media?'.³ In such writing, there is little sense that what is being addressed could be seen as a series of discursive encounters, negotiations and acts of meaning-making in which indigenous people – communities and audiences – are *productive*.

Certainly, the points of concern in this type of writing are important. The question of what happens when a new communication medium is summarily introduced to a culture is an important one. But the language used to describe this interaction is misleading. And it is noticeable that such writing is fascinated with the relationship only of *traditionally-oriented* Aboriginal communities to the media of mass communication.

The 'Reporting and Reception' project aimed to find different ways to address the question of Aboriginal audiences. Ethnographic audience work focuses on the 'reality' of private, unmediated, unguarded utterances. The individual audience member is placed against the public machinery of mass communications – a model of culture that has predictable results. As Hartley argues:

If you look at a very complex piece of communicational machinery – a truck, say – whose intricacies you admire but whose power you fear, and then you look at a laboratory mouse and you ask: if I put this

mouse on this road in the way of this juggernaut, how is the mouse going to interact with it? – the answer is going to be obvious but not worth listening to. Wrong comparison: silly question.⁴

By contrast, our project sought to analyze public audiences. This resulted in a quite different – but no less *real*⁵ – picture of indigenous media consumption in Australia. This methodology led to the discovery that indigenous audiences engage with mass communications media in the public sphere, in a public way.

Researching the ‘reception’ of media by indigenous audiences in Australia, we did not sit with individual viewers and note their reactions to media texts; nor did we attempt to listen in on their conversations. Rather, we approached this question by considering the cultural production of indigenous audience members in relation to the media. The texts they produced did not have to be private, unguarded or thoughtless. The project was not concerned to uncover what they ‘really’ thought. Rather, publicly circulated texts were taken as the materials for analysis. The result was a model of Aboriginal audience quite different from many of those which have been previously produced in Australia.⁶ It was explicitly ‘strategic’, ‘partial’ and even ‘uncertain’.⁷ We make no easy claims for the ‘authenticity’ of the public audience we describe, but we would resist the attempts of ethnographically-oriented audience research to dismiss it as merely ‘textual’.

Surveying recent writing on audience research in media studies, it seems that two commonsense – and quite contradictory – axioms underlie it:

1. ‘Reality’ is a discursive construct
2. Ethnographic studies of audiences are more ‘real’ than other forms of media research.

While the first of these is familiar, the second I think is less often stated in such plain terms. Nevertheless, an analysis of

recent writing suggests that such a perception is present in much media studies research on audiences. A continuing strand of media theory – and by no means a marginal or residual one – insists that a necessary correlative to the overly abstract work of textual analysis in media studies is a turn not only to audiences, but to *ethnographic* work on audiences. And this is often promoted as a turn to the ‘real’. For example, Virginia Nightingale’s *Studying Audiences* is subtitled *The shock of the real*. David Morley and Roger Silverstone claim that ‘Ethnographies, by their very nature, are grounded in the realities of other people’. Rosalind Brunt claims that previous attention to textual audiences in media studies demands a turn to ‘ethnography’, which deals with ‘actual beings living in a material world’. Marie Gillespie suggests that: ‘the ethnographer reads the world through the eyes of her informants themselves’.⁸

What is this ‘ethnographic’ work which is championed by these writers? It is relatively easy to describe it, for its boundaries have been carefully policed. Writers such as Nightingale, Nicholas Janowski and Fred Wester, and James Lull claim that audience research which does not involve participant observation should not be calling itself ‘ethnographic’.⁹ Analysis of audiences through texts such as letters, public statements and so on is, we are told, not ethnographic: and thus, by the logic mentioned above, is not the ‘real’.

Such a position, when explicitly formulated, is unconvincing. For it is uncontroversial nowadays to note that *all* social material must be textualized before it can become meaningful, and circulated as academic work. That is to say, the spoken words of informants, their interaction when watching television, even the furniture on which they sit must be rendered as texts before researchers can make use of them.¹⁰ Letters to researchers, or other forms of public utterance, are no more or less

textualized than the 'private' or unguarded performances transcribed by ethnographers.

This is emphatically not to suggest that there is no difference between these various kinds of evidence. The status of these texts differs in terms of their public/private status, and their authorship (researcher or informant). I quibble merely with the suggestion that private, unguarded utterances, transcribed by researchers, are more 'real', 'authentic' or 'natural' than those produced by audiences for public circulation.¹¹ The claims implicit in the terminology also worry me. To posit that one methodology investigates 'reality' is not simply to describe it as one possible approach among others. It rather grants it an ontological priority. If ethnographic audience research claims, uniquely, to be able to access 'reality', this is a fairly strong claim on value. It leaves other approaches to media research with, at the most, a marginal importance.

In 'The Reporting and Reception of Indigenous Issues', we found that indigenous Australians were (and again, even stating this explicitly makes it sound absurd to have to do so) perfectly capable of formulating public responses to their own representation. They did not exist purely in the form of disenfranchised individual consumers. Which – again to try to anticipate argument – is not to deny inequity in access to the public sphere. Obviously, the massive resources of some communications companies provide them with privileged access to the technology of mass distribution. But, as Rita Felski has recently argued with respect to 'the feminist public sphere',¹² this does not condemn groups without such resources to remain voiceless in the 'private' sphere. They may not have easy access to 'the' (dominant) public sphere – but there are a multiplicity of other public spheres to which they can contribute.

We need not dismiss these powerful, public indigenous audiences as being less 'real' than those uncovered by ethnographic research. Rather, we can accept that the object of study

of all audience research is textual. Similarly, while it is true that the indigenous audience does not have equal access to 'the' (national) public sphere, this does not deny it access to all public spheres. Against a history of indigenous audiences who were not productive of meaning, who functioned only as private individuals, and so had little defence against media 'bombardment', our proposal is that public and partial versions of Aboriginal audiencehood provide enabling pictures of its interaction with the media in Australia.

Alan McKee

- 1 See John Hartley and Alan McKee, *The Indigenous Public Sphere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
- 2 Neil Turner, 'Pitchat and beyond', *Artlink*, vol. 10, nos. 1–2 (1990), pp. 43–5; 'Culture shock by satellite', *Australian Society*, 1 October 1982, pp. 14–15; D.H. Thompson, 'The influence of film in an isolated traditionally oriented Aboriginal community', *The Aboriginal Child at School*, vol. 11, no. 4 (1983), pp. 47–53.
- 3 Elihu Katz, 'Can authentic cultures survive new media?', *Journal of Communication Australia*, vol. 27, no. 2 (1977), pp. 113–121.
- 4 John Hartley *Popular Reality: Journalism, Modernity, Popular Culture* (London: Arnold, 1996), p. 234.
- 5 See Sonia Livingstone, 'Audience reception: the role of the viewer in retelling romantic drama', in James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (eds), *Mass Media and Society* (London, New York, Melbourne and Auckland: Edward Arnold, 1991), p. 285; Dennis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*, third edition (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage, 1994), p. 283; John Hartley, *Teleology: Studies in Television* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 105; Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 11; and Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).
- 6 Although for attempts to find a similar approach see Eric Michaels, 'Hollywood iconography: a Warlpiri reading', in Philip Drummond and Richard Paterson (eds), *Television and its Audience: International Research Perspectives* (London: British Film Institute, 1988), pp. 109–24, and Michael G Singh 'Struggle for truth: Aboriginal reviewers contest disabling prejudice in print', *Aboriginal Child at School*, vol. 14, no. 1 (February/March, 1986), pp. 4–5.
- 7 Ang, *Living Room Wars*, pp. 41–2.
- 8 Virginia Nightingale, *Studying Audiences: the Shock of the Real* (London: Routledge, 1996); David Morley and Roger Silverstone, 'Communication and context: ethnographic perspectives on the media audience', in Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Nicholas W Jankowski (eds), *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 54; Rosalind Brunt, 'Engaging with the Popular: audiences for mass culture and what to say about them', in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treicher (eds), *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 69; Marie Gillespie, *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 1.
- 9 Virginia Nightingale, 'What's "ethnographic" about ethnographic audience

- research?', in John Frow and Meaghan Morris (eds), *Australian Cultural Studies: a Reader* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), p. 153; Nicholas W. Jankowski and Fred Wester, 'The qualitative tradition in social science enquiry: contributions to mass communication research', in Jensen and Jankowski (eds), *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies*, p. 55; James Lull, 'Critical response: the audience as nuisance', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol. 5, no. 3, (1998), p. 242.
- 10 For examples of the last of these, see Roger Silverstone, Eric Hirsch and David Morley, 'Listening to a long conversation: an ethnographic approach to the study of information and communication technologies in the home', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1991), p. 213; and Ellen Seiter 'Making distinctions in TV audience research: case study of a troubling interview', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1990), p. 66.
- 11 James Clifford suggests that it is the lack of public authorship of informant's words that traditionally guarantees the status of ethnographic research: 'the oral-to-literate narrative [is] hidden in the very word informant. . . . The Native speaks, the anthropologist writes. "Writing" or "inscribing" functions controlled by the indigenous collaborators are elided . . . thinking of the so-called informant as writer/inscriber shakes things up a bit'. James Clifford, 'Traveling cultures', in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treicher (eds), *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 100.
- 12 Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

New Perspectives on Expressionist Film I. From Caligari to Kuhle Wampe: the Golden Age of German Cinema, 1919–32. University of Edinburgh, 26–28 March 1999

The tension-riddled history of the cinema of the Weimar Republic has long been a concern of film scholarship. Indeed, one of the key texts of classical film historiography – Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler: a Psychological Study of the German Film* – plays a central role in film theory's conceptualization of the cinemas of both the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. The 'New Perspectives on Expressionist Film' conference, hosted by the University of Edinburgh, attempted to both re-examine and problematize the accepted wisdom about this period and to challenge the importance of the two key theoretical texts which define Weimar cinema: Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* and Lotte Eisner's *L'Écran démoniaque*. The cornerstone of the conference was a reconsideration of these two texts which define – and, many participants argued, limit – the debates surrounding Weimar cinema. It was a rethinking of the

works of Kracauer and Eisner that provided the focal point of the opening plenary, although throughout the course of the conference, it was Kracauer's work that came under the most attack.

Conference organizer Dietrich Scheunemann opened the plenary by dismissing Kracauer's text as: Rankian and one-dimensional; an elision of many of the cinematic styles found in Weimar cinema; a dubious historical tract which equates a decline in political culture with a decline in cultural production. Scheunemann went on to level similar critiques against Eisner, claiming that because Expressionism was her dominant interpretive trope, other cinematic styles present in even Expressionistic films were left by the wayside. After this opening volley, the question of the role played by Kracauer and Eisner in the historical formation of German film culture was thrown open to the plenary. Marc Silberman positioned Kracauer not only as a film historian but also a cultural critic. More specifically, Silberman contended that Kracauer had to be seen as an outsider in relation to German cultural politics of the time because of his relationship with the Frankfurt School. Further, Silberman argued that Kracauer's *Caligari* text must be understood in the context of its consumption: the book was written for a US liberal-intellectual audience and, as such, had to address questions such as 'How did Hitler come to power?'. Silberman concluded that Kracauer's text is problematic because of its reductive nature and that perhaps early cinema in Germany could be better understood if conceptualized as a movement which began with the rise of the feature in 1910 and ended with the coming of sound in 1929 – a framework which foregrounds production over politics. Jürgen Karsten argued that both Eisner and Kracauer foreground art films and therefore exclude more than they include. Furthermore, because of Kracauer's focus on politics he overlooked the aesthetic side of production which,

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Karsten claimed, led to his pre-ordained set of conclusions. By way of contrast, Karsten argued that the multiplicity of film styles and genres to be found in popular Weimar cinema pointed away from the deterministic account offered in Kracauer's study. Thomas Koebner continued the attack on Kracauer, and argued that the exiled film historian rewrote the history of the 1920s in light of the Third Reich. Koebner claimed, in contradiction to Kracauer, that the films of the 1920s could be better understood as the products of Kaiser Wilhelm and of World War I. Thomas Elsaesser argued forcefully that both Kracauer's and Eisner's books had to be understood as texts written in exile, by exiles. Their audiences were non-German, as Eisner's text was written for the French cinephile while Kracauer's was written for a US audience. Elsaesser went on to argue that both had to come to terms with their own cinephilia and their mutual contributions to Weimar cinema. Given the historical context, then, Elsaesser was more lenient in his reappraisal of Kracauer and Eisner than many other participants.

The individual papers built upon the critiques of the opening plenary, with each speaker examining a given film, genre or director, in light of the long shadow cast by the works of Eisner and Kracauer. Marc Silberman began the second day of the conference with his analysis of Ernst Lubitsch's *Madame Dubarry* (1919). Silberman took a different tack from that of Kracauer, and argued that the film – set in revolutionary France – interrogates notions of self, gender and national identity in the Weimar Republic. Silberman accounted for this development not by turning to the kind of historico-allegorical readings found in Kracauer, but instead addressing the way in which the gaze is employed in Lubitsch's film. Contra Kracauer, Silberman claimed that the film marginalizes questions of history while foregrounding historical ornament, which allows for a spectatorial process

intimately linked to the notion of the gaze.

Claudia Lessen examined Joe May's rarely-seen *Herrin der Welt* (1920), and addressed the neglected genre of the German serial. Lessen argued that it was May's desire to make a film for the global market, and as such he capitalized on both American-style publicity schemes and popular film genres, such as the detective film and the melodrama, in an attempt to reach an audience outside Germany. Norbert Grob's paper on Fritz Lang's *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler* (1922) fitted nicely with the preceding presentation, as he also addressed the role of the serial in the formation of early cinema in Germany. Grob addressed aspects of Lang's work which are often overlooked or relegated to the catch-all description 'Expressionist'. He argued convincingly that the notion of the spectacle in Lang's work needed reconsideration, as Lang transformed the spectacle into psychological narrative, and this transformation took both the form and content of the film beyond simple Expressionist aesthetic tendencies by internalizing these conflicts into the character of Mabuse. Here, Mabuse becomes a key factor in our understanding of the serial, as the tensions between the 'real' and the uncanny at the centre of this character propel the narrative and the serial forward, always deferring closure in terms of both character and structure.

Dietrich Scheunemann's paper on Robert Wiene's *Das Kabinett des Dr Caligari* (1919) picked up where his opening statements during the plenary of the previous day left off. Scheunemann argued that Kracauer's allegorical reading of *Caligari* led to his gross misreading of the history of Weimar cinema. In addition, he claimed that if *Caligari* was the key Expressionist film text which reflected the cultural and political concerns of Weimar Germany, why were there no other traces of this influence appearing concurrently in Weimar cinema? Scheunemann argued that the Expressionist traits in *Caligari* are a

distant echo of movements that had already run their course by 1920 in German painting and literature. He concluded by trying to re-invest the film with the ambiguity, introduced by the notorious framing device set in the asylum, as a means of destabilizing the forced, one-dimensional reading offered by Kracauer.

The next two papers placed Weimar cinema in relation to the international cinemas of the 1920s. Claudia Dillmann's analysis of Paul Wegener's *Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam* (1920) placed the film in the realm of the abstract, as she argued that all art departs from abstraction and not from the real. German Expressionism, therefore, is better understood as part of an international trend away from realism in the 1920s. Dillmann positioned *Der Golem* in relation to other cinematic movements which foreground abstraction; she also claimed that the nations which preferred this mode of representation over realism were the northwestern Europeans, the Asians and the Germans. Rolland Man's presentation on *Nosferatu* (1922) reconsidered the ambiguities that lie at the heart of Murnau's film and which are elided in Kracauer's text. According to Man, Kracauer downplayed comparisons between Stoker's *Dracula* and Murnau's film, as to follow this route would destroy Kracauer's argument as to the place of this film in relation to German history and heritage. Drawing on the works of Elsaesser and Paul Coates, Man placed the film within international film culture of the time through a thoughtful analysis of both the monster and the double.

Jürgen Karsten's presentation on Paul Leni's *Wachsfigurenkabinett* (1924) explored the ways in which this film can and cannot be considered Expressionist. While Karsten admitted the third part of the film – the Jack the Ripper episode – could only be seen as Expressionistic, the earlier segments, while

stylized, do not fit this category. Interestingly, Karsten argued that it was not the *mise-en-scène* which gave the Ripper episode its Expressionist feel; instead, it was the cinematography that did so. Karsten's presentation was complemented by one of the highlights of the conference: a screening of a recent, tinted, Italian restoration of Leni's film.

Conference participants also addressed non-narrative cinema. Walter Schodert made a convincing argument for positioning Walter Ruttmann rather than Hans Richter as the originator of the first wave of German experimental films. He began his presentation by stating that Kracauer devoted only two pages to the experimental film, and that all the claims made in these two pages were wrong. Schodert demonstrated Ruttmann's historical importance by screening his recently rediscovered and restored film, *Opus I* (1921), which pre-dates Richter's first work. He also pointed to the fact that the only previous account of early avant-garde film in Germany was penned by Richter, who rewrote history by placing himself as the father of the avant garde. More generally, Schodert traced the beginnings of avant-garde animation in Germany to the Cubist and Constructivist movements, along with the so-called 'primitive arts'.

Other papers on *Nosferatu*, *Berlin, die Symphonie der Grossstadt* (1927) and the works of Murnau added to an interesting and challenging conference. Overall, the presentations that took place over the three days went a long way towards reinvigorating the debates surrounding Weimar cinema, both because of, and in spite of, the fact that Kracauer was kicked around so much. Future instalments (the next is scheduled for the University of Mainz) should prove productive in keeping this reconsideration alive.

Scott MacKenzie

reviews

review:

Kenton Bamford, *Distorted Images: British National Identity and Film in the 1920s*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1999, 227 pp.

Jeffrey Richards (ed.), *The Unknown Thirties: an Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929–1939*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1998, 276 pp.

SARAH STREET

One despairing critic of British screenplays commented in 1920 that 'I almost believe that some [British producers] would have preferred adaptations of the Telephone Directory to the first original work, by an unknown author, that could have been offered them' (Langford Reed, quoted in Bamford, p. 78). According to Bamford's *Distorted Images*, the Telephone Directory in question would have contained the names of rich, upper-class people who insisted that British films told only their stories, set in rural locations and acted out in styles that were primarily based on West End theatre. Such an analysis of British cinema of the 1920s is not entirely new, in many respects resembling that of Rachael Low, an author whose approach is strikingly similar to that of Bamford.¹ Both argue that British cinema struggled in the 1920s to free itself from an archaic and slavish devotion to adaptation of both popular and 'literary' texts, and from technical backwardness which left the field clear for Hollywood to become 'the people's cinema'.

Bamford develops this thesis by drawing on a wealth of information from trade papers, writing manuals, contemporary comment and from plot summaries of hundreds of films, many of which have not survived. Indeed, the strength of his book is its apposite attention to detail and ability to convey a sense of the

¹ Rachael Low, *History of the British Film, 1918–1929* (London: British Film Institute, 1971).

period by picking choice quotations from contemporary sources. What emerges is a picture of a cinema that was incapable of representing the majority of the population's concerns, steeped in the 'rural idyll' (p. 12) of upper-class dramas and determined to resist social change. While Douglas Fairbanks in *Robin Hood* (1922) showed that Hollywood could thrill audiences with the story of the hero who robbed the rich to give to the poor, all Britain could manage was an inferior contemporary version featuring a character who dressed in evening wear, sported a 'jaunty monicle' [sic] and lived in a Bayswater hotel (p. 105).

Some films did, however, manage to appeal to the mass audience and flout the prevailing tendency to represent working-class characters as stereotypes. Bamford devotes a chapter each to Betty Balfour, star of the *Squibs* films, and producer George Pearson who stood out from the majority of British producers as being in touch with the popular mood. These chapters are the last in a book which otherwise tells a depressing tale of a film industry that was economically, aesthetically and ideologically hide-bound; the negative side of 'heritage' conservatism. Bampton makes this point repeatedly, so much so that apart from Betty Balfour and George Pearson, the noted other exceptions, or points of undoubted interest, receive scant attention. A case in point is Ivor Novello, whose star persona and popularity sit uncomfortably with Bampton's analysis of unsophisticated representations of class in British films. As the work of Christine Gledhill has shown, films such as *The Rat* (1925) contained subtle commentary on questions of social stratification, performed with an acting style which was enhanced by a convergence of stage melodrama and film technique.² The reason given for the backwardness of British producers is also unconvincing. Bampton argues that their concern to make film 'respectable' forced them to ingratiate themselves with critics who praised stage and literary adaptations. Surely such a tendency requires a more sustained analysis of film producers' own class backgrounds, links between film critics and the wider 'Establishment', as well as a serious attempt to interrogate stylistic traits like pictorialism which, as Andrew Higson has shown, may have contributed to the consolidation of a British film aesthetic.³ As it stands, *Distorted Images* contains a wealth of tantalizing detail which needs to be integrated into a more extensive argument: what exactly was being distorted, and why?

The Unknown Thirties adopts an altogether different approach. This collection of essays claims to 'chart a new map' (p. vii) of British cinema in the 1930s, mainly by concentrating on directors, actors, writers and themes which have received little attention in previous accounts. The revisionist argument that British cinema during this period was about more than Hitchcock, Gracie Fields, George Formby and the rise of British documentary, produces a

2 Christine Gledhill, 'Taking it forward', in Sarah Street and Linda Fitzsimmons (eds), *Moving Performance: British Stage and Screen, 1890s-1920s* (London: Flicks Books, 1999).

3 Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

more optimistic picture of British cinema than that offered by Bamford. In many ways *The Unknown Thirties* addresses some of the grey areas suggested in *Distorted Images*, for example the legacy of popular stage melodrama in British cinema which is analyzed in Richards's chapter on Tod Slaughter, or the adaptability of action thrillers by Edgar Wallace and John Buchan for the screen, as pointed out by James Chapman. These locate a popular demand for melodrama and adaptation, categories which appeared to be problematic in the 1920s. The book also adds to our knowledge of European influence in British cinema, particularly the work of actor Conrad Veidt, producer Julius Hagen, and directors Bernard Vorhaus and Berthold Viertel. Statistical information provided by John Sedgwick's and Linda Wood's re-evaluation of 'quota quickies' propose a healthier and more artistically varied British cinema than has hitherto been appreciated, the much-maligned quota legislation of 1927 emerging as a positive factor which facilitated the revival of the British film industry.

Since neither book looks outside its chosen decade it is difficult to understand the changes that must have occurred in the key years 1928–33 to explain such a recovery: either Bamford's picture is too pessimistic or Richards is over optimistic. An examination of broader themes, continuities and ruptures between the 1920s and 1930s is necessary to gain a longer perspective on the significance of the impact of quota legislation, the coming of sound, reactions to Hollywood and the importance of political and social change. Interestingly, it is Bamford's book, with its immersion in contemporary source material, which implicitly suggests a way out of what would appear to be a methodological impasse. In his comments about the popularity of Hollywood's films he notes a different address not only in the films but also in fan magazines which conceive of an audience in a populist manner. The study of changes in film and fan culture might therefore form a productive aspect of further analysis of the contrasts and continuities between the two decades. Another important theme which warrants further scrutiny is suggested in Mark Glancy's chapter in *The Unknown Thirties* on MGM's production activities in Britain towards the end of the decade. In looking at British cinema the shadow of Hollywood is never far away; that this might have had a positive influence on *both* British audiences and films has rarely been proposed. Similarly, we get glimpses of such an approach when Bamford discusses the lessons learned by British actors in Hollywood and Herbert Wilcox's successful exploitation of American actresses in British films, for example, Dorothy Gish in *Nell Gwyn* (1926), indicating the potential of Anglo-American cultural rapport.

These reservations apart, both books advance British film scholarship. Although the overall argument is far from novel, *Distorted Images* enters relatively uncharted territory and describes

- 4 Anthony Aldgate, 'Comedy, class and containment: the British domestic cinema of the 1930s', in James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds), *British Cinema History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983); Kevin Gough-Yates, 'The British feature film as a European concern: Britain and the emigre filmmaker, 1933-45', in Günter Berghaus (ed.), *Theatre and Film in Exile* (Oxford: Oswald Wolff and Berg, 1989).

the period and its films in considerable detail. It demonstrates that much can be gleaned from non-filmic sources which it has used with care and accuracy. The chapter on Betty Balfour rightly highlights an important and relatively neglected figure in British film history. *The Unknown Thirties* is a revision of an old map rather than the presentation of a new one. Previous scholars have already pointed to the revival of the British film industry in the 1930s and to the influence of European directors in Britain.⁴ But an extension of these developments is useful and distinct, and it is refreshing to see such a range of issues covered in one volume, particularly questions of acting style and performance. Both books are indicative of the upsurge of interest in scholarship on British cinema, I.B. Tauris being one of the major publishers involved in its advancement.

review:

Peter Goodwin, *Television under the Tories: Broadcasting Policy, 1979–97*. London: British Film Institute, 1998, 186 pp.

Paul Bonner and Lesley Aston, *Independent Television in Britain, Volume 5. ITV & IBA 1981–92: the Old Relationship Changes*. London: MacMillan, 1998, 542 pp.

MARC SCHOLES

The 1980s heralded the beginning of the end for the very British broadcasting duopoly of the BBC and Independent Television (ITV). Technologies, new politics and new industry players were all looking to reshape the system in their own interests. Despite the array of forces looking for change, British broadcasting made a formidable opponent; a robust structure, a programming pedigree with a global reputation, and a public service tradition which laid claim to the moral high ground. Surely, this quality system would not just roll over and play dead – or would it?

If you want to know just what happens when you get Margaret Thatcher, industry leaders, Rupert Murdoch and the techno-merchants taking on the television establishment then these authors can provide an insight or two. Although the two books do not cover exactly the same time period, they effectively provide different perspectives on the same phenomenon – the 1980s – and its impact on British television. To summarize their findings in this review is to be optimistic in the extreme; the best I can hope for is to provide a reminder for those who remember television as it was and an eye-opener for those who cannot.

1980s politics played a significant role in bringing about changes in British television, but to what extent was this influence the product of a Tory master plan or simply a series of knee-jerk reactions to events unfolding around an uncertain government? Was eighteen years of Tory television policy a product of forethought or afterthought; strategy or spontaneity? Within days of moving into Downing Street in 1979, the word was out that the new Conservative Government intended to take on the broadcasting unions and their 'restrictive practices', which were seen as holding back the British television industry. With the launch of a new 'fourth' channel imminent (a major event in the days when our television sets only had four buttons!) the opportunity was there for any new political agenda to have an immediate impact. Would the new channel be used to disrupt the cosy twenty-five-year-old BBC-ITV duopoly through the introduction of new commercial forces, or would it fulfil promises of increased access and openness, hoped for in the broadcasting debates of the 1970s?

One of the problems Goodwin faces in *Television under the Tories* is not only how to identify and track any policy strategy, but also how to effectively assess the impact of that policy. A recurring uncertainty is just how much power to attribute to the different interests and the individuals behind them. For example, just what part did the powerful UK industry play in countering and deflecting Government attempts at meddling with the status quo? In the case of the launch of the fourth channel, despite the ominous initial tone of Government comment on the industry, William Whitelaw, then Home Secretary, allowed the industry commercial regulator (the IBA), to play a decisive role in determining much of the detail regarding how the new broadcaster would function. The consequence was an addition to the system which complemented the existing fare and extended the reaches of the public service domain.

In addition to the launch of the new channel, the first period at the helm for the Thatcher Government focused upon the potential of the technologies of Direct Broadcasting by Satellite (DBS) and broadband cable. Fed by various publications from free market think tanks and Government inquiries, Tory aspirations for the technologies were high. British programming and technical know-how would place the country at the forefront of global developments, generating jobs and money. There would be plenty of profits for investors and the market would lead the way; there would be no room (financially or ideologically) for public funds and regulation would be 'light touch'. Initially it was envisaged that the cable systems, avidly taken up by a public seeking additional entertainment, would provide the means for the supply of a range of information and work-related functions, including financial and commercial services. In reality, the expansion of cable was nowhere near the expectations of the early 1980s. It was only the introduction of DBS programming, from Sky and BSB,

in the second half of the 1980s that stimulated any real growth in cable take-up, and the only viable source of finance (and programming) was North American. Despite this, towards the end of the 1980s Tory policy on cable and satellite was hailed as a success, not for the growth of the British industry, but rather on the grounds that it attracted billions of pounds of inward investment. Vanished, along with any hopes of a British cable industry, were all notions of the real reason for broadband cable: the interactive banking, shopping and so on. The early policy aspirations for the new means of distribution had been overtaken by commercial events and had sunk without trace.

Following the 1983 General Election victory, Tory policy shifted from establishing new means of distribution to attempting a reformation of the television establishment. Competition, quality and choice could only come through greater efficiency, and this meant increasing the role played by market forces in the system. A head of steam was building to allow the BBC to take advertising; the advertisers wanted it, as it would drive airtime costs down, and Thatcher was known personally to favour the idea. A committee of enquiry was established under the chairmanship of Professor Alan Peacock to consider the future of funding for the BBC. It rejected the idea of advertising on the BBC, and moved the broadcasting agenda away from public service towards consumer sovereignty and efficiency of resource allocation, as broadcasting's organizing principles. By suggesting the impractical subscription route as the way forward for the BBC it effectively safeguarded the licence fee. Peacock also proposed a quota for independent production and that a process of competitive tender be used to allocate ITV licences. The focus of Government policy had been shifted by its own committee away from the BBC and to ITV, and the backdrop had been set for the 1991 Broadcasting Act and the 1993 franchise auction. Infighting between the DTI and Home Office over television policy was apparent on a number of occasions and served to highlight the tensions within Conservative thinking about the specific role of the market.

Goodwin successfully plots the twists and turns of Tory broadcasting policy through eighteen years of government, from the heights of the Thatcher years to the Major post-lude. Key elements of Goodwin's review of the consequences of Tory rule include a new management structure at the BBC, the establishment of the new revenue stream of subscription (supporting cable and satellite), and a significant shift in employment patterns within broadcasting, away from secure to freelance work.

Despite the grotesque Spitting Image depiction of Margaret Thatcher on its cover, the book is not a partisan account of the Tory years but rather a thoroughly researched and closely argued text. If anything, its faithfulness to close argument denies us any sense of

the drama of the times that it tracks. We touch briefly upon what 'might have been' had Tory policy been different, but this is a brief glimpse which is quickly discarded. The international context is minimal and further comparative analysis could have broadened the book's appeal and given a better insight into the impact of the Thatcher years. For example, carrying through the comparison with German cable policy to 'in-practice' industry outcomes related to policy objectives would have been enlightening. Similarly, more attention could have been given to the impact of the policy-driven changes upon intended policy outcomes, such as changes in television schedules and viewing patterns; a key factor when considering the notion of consumer choice. But maybe this is asking too much of just one book.

Goodwin sees Tory policy as being 'characterised by both major zigzags and a good deal of opportunistic reaction to events' (p. 166). Despite these criticisms, it is clear that there is one distinguishing feature of the Tory years – the drive for market liberalization. Television was moved towards being more a matter of the marketplace and less a matter of public service; perhaps the most significant legacy of Tory policy has been the agenda setting for New Labour, in particular, the dogma of no more public spending.

In *Independent Television in Britain* Bonner and Aston combine documented sources with some sixty interviews with key broadcasting figures from the 1980s to very good effect. Taking a broader approach than previous volumes, this text is aimed at a wider readership, including media students, and provides the kind of background information necessary to contextualize players, organizations and events. The level of authenticity that the interviews give this book is significant. First-hand accounts of meetings, debates and confrontations give a colour and perspective to the account of events that is both illuminating and stimulating. Of course, some views should be taken with a pinch of salt, but Bonner and Aston successfully juxtapose perspectives so as to allow alternative interpretations of events. One of the strengths of this methodology is that it enables the roles played by the various individuals within the organizations, political parties and companies to come to the fore.

The topics covered are those that hit the headlines at the time; the Peacock Report, the Broadcasting Bill, the ITV auction and so forth. Yet, despite the focus on the 'events' of the period, it effectively conveys a sense of the political and economic exigencies of the 1980s and the consequences for players such as the IBA. Industry voices quickly identify the key role played by Government anti-union views. Thatcher was concerned that the monopoly of public funds was leading to excessive pay demands and restrictive practices, and holding the industry back and working against the consumer. It is

apparent that little consideration was given to the inflationary impact the introduction of competitive forces would have upon the cost of premium sports, film and 'talent' costs.

Bonner and Aston place a different emphasis on the role of broadcasting institutions to that of Goodwin; they clearly portray an IBA that had lost the high ground, in particular when it came to the proposed ITV franchise auction. The regulator's lack of pro-activity following the opaque 1980 contract awards left the industry vulnerable to Peacock's enquiry and allowed the Government to take the initiative. This complacency was compounded by a lack of unity and direction within the ITV companies themselves. It seems as if the sector did not take the suggestion of the introduction of competitive tender to the franchise allocation seriously, until it was too late. From the lows of the franchise losers, whose complaints were heard before the Law Lords, to the highs of the uncontested winners, the interviews capture the detail, significance and emotion of the process. Accounts are given, from inside the various ITV boardrooms, of the preparations for the franchise auction, and the story of the £32,000,000 Thames bid and the Independent Television Commission's consideration of possible 'exceptional circumstances' for Thames is significant. Accountability and openness have never been hallmarks of broadcasting authorities in Britain, and the franchise auction and its aftermath did little to enhance their reputation. Thankfully, lessons have been learnt and the ITC has now embarked upon a more open account of its decision-making process.

The account of the 'Downing Street Seminar', when Margaret Thatcher brought together 'the great and the good' (and those aspiring to be such) with industry players and academics, has to be my favourite inside view. Depending upon who you were, this moment in broadcasting history was either exhilarating or humiliating. In terms of its function, the meeting was either a sign of the Government's willingness to listen and learn, or a time to assert preconceived ideas.

Essential to an understanding of any broadcasting system is an awareness of the substance that drives the system – the programmes. Bonner and Aston provide a solid account of key aspects of ITV programming during the period: *Death on the Rock*, the war over the rights to broadcast *Dallas*, and the arrival of *Baywatch* (to save the 5.30 pm Saturday slot) are all accounted for. There is also a detailed account of the ITV Networking system and the role of the 'Big Five', revealing the causes behind much of the tensions within the old ITV system. The volume also gives an early assessment of the new regulatory system, pointing to ITC's £500,000 fine of Granada for product placement and its criticism of Carlton programming quality as early indications that it does have teeth. However, it does question the ability of the ITC to stay in touch with industry

practice, citing its criticism of the content of *Hollywood Women*, while it remained oblivious to the programme's technical innovations.

Bonner and Aston draw upon their considerable industry experience to produce an engaging and revealing account of the most dramatic period in Independent Television's history. While its strengths lie in its sources, so do its weaknesses, and although it does provide an invaluable source of insider detail it lacks the overarching critical position it needs if it is to be anything more than a reference book in academic circles. While its coverage is very strong there are gaps, and more should have been said about the significance of the TVam experience in terms of the introduction of commercial forces, the value of a franchise and the quality television argument – although the book is already five hundred pages in length.

Both of these books provide vital insights into a critical period in broadcasting history and should find a reserved spot on the shelves of anyone seriously interested in the development of broadcasting.

review:

Paul Wells, *Understanding Animation*. London: Routledge, 1998, 265 pp.

Kevin S. Sandler (ed.), *Reading the Rabbit: Explorations in Warner Bros. Animation*. Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998, 271 pp.

RICHARD NEUPERT

Though these two welcome additions to animation studies have few similar traits, they both help fill the very real gaps in the critical and historical treatment of animation. With *Understanding Animation*, Paul Wells presents a broad range of animation in what he defines as 'Part history, part theoretical speculation, and part spirited defence of a neglected but important film form' (p. 8). Kevin Sandler's *Reading the Rabbit*, an intelligently edited anthology, provides a very critically diverse group of essays that 'map the theoretical and historical implications of Warner Bros animation, in terms of its place not only in animation history but also in American cinema and popular culture' (p. 4).

Understanding Animation is an interesting, if at times frustrating, book, which Paul Wells admits in his Introduction is something of a 'work in progress'. It offers up a wealth of observations and provides over 30 case-studies of individual films, though it would benefit from more than its current 14 illustrations. Wells argues that animation regularly presents complex and contradictory meanings: 'Animation as a film language and film art is a more sophisticated and flexible medium than live-action film, and thus offers a greater opportunity for filmmakers to be more imaginative and less conservative' (p. 6). Wells is a valiant advocate for animation and discusses a wide variety of films that exploit fully animation's film language.

Wells organizes his book into six chapters. Chapter 1, 'Thinking about animated film', addresses issues of history and modes of construction. He begins with a very brief history of flip books and 'proto-animation' trick films by Méliès and Blackton before moving up to Gertie, Mutt and Jeff, Felix and, eventually, Disney's hyperrealistic aesthetic. This chapter opposes Disney's excessive realism with a section labelled 'True animation?' citing the liberating freedom of experimental animators like Len Lye and Hans Richter. While the book strives to include alternative animation, it dismisses Disney too readily and could benefit from more detailed analysis of the 'hyperreal' style. Moreover, the tentative titles for this and subsequent chapters seem to warn against expecting too many conclusions, but the film selections and overall structure could use more justification.

Chapter 2, 'Notes toward a theory of animation', establishes a spectrum with 'Orthodox' animation at one end and 'Experimental' at the other, and a list of 'terms and conditions' for each, such as 'narrative form' vs 'interpretive form'. Unfortunately, Wells, who likes to use lists of categories and subsets, rarely clarifies fully the value or function of his groupings. And his test-case for orthodox animation is *Duck Amuck*, which he then admits is 'untypical of the kind of style and unity in orthodox animation' (p. 39). The experimental case-studies are more convincing, with Lye's *Colour Box*, Alexieff's pinscreen *The Nose*, and David Anderson's *Deadsy*. Wells also adds a third category, 'Developmental Animation', which is 'backward looking' yet somehow redefines animation, 'requiring the viewer to recognize dominant forms but also to realise that certain films reposition the viewer' (p. 52). Test case analyses include Joanna Quinn's *Girl's Night Out*, Nick Park's *Creature Comforts*, and Karen Watson's *Daddy's Little Bit of Dresden China*. This chapter never really 'theorizes' the materials or representational processes of animation, but only carves out some consistent points of interest within these three rather fluid categories.

Understanding Animation's third chapter, 'Once upon a time: narrative strategies', continues to present a strong and wide range of films as test-cases, from Betty Boop's *Snow White* to Yuri Norstein's *Tale of Tales*, among others. The strategies are collected as a list of ten 'Definitions and devices' including such headings as 'Synecdoche', 'Sound' and 'Penetration' ('a revelatory tool'). But these diverse categories often lack clarity and function, owing to a hesitation to adopt any central narrative model. For instance, in *Gerald McBoing Boing*, 'noise narrates the scene', and helps point out the relations between the animator and 'requirements of the text' (p. 102), while in the 'Acting and performance' section Wells argues that 'the animator is an actor [so] some of the techniques suggested by the Stanislavsky model are appropriate to the analysis of the construction of character' (p. 105). If noise can narrate, and an

animator is an actor, I am left a bit puzzled about Wells's definition of narration. Chief among the positive effects of this chapter, however, are its call for more attention to soundtracks, and its increasingly diverse range of films, from Jan Svankmajer's *Jabberwocky* to Francis Pik Ching Yeung's *Gwee*.

Chapter 4, '25 ways to start laughing', continues the loose, but often entertaining, style of Wells's book. The list of 25 entries 'constitute an attempt to both chronicle the evolution of humor in the animated film and create a typology of gags and comic structures' (p. 127). The twenty-five sections include labels like 'Visual pun', 'Adult Avery', 'Yabba-dabba-doo', or 'Some theories on character comedy'. Once again there are interesting observations, but no unity from section to section, as some headings seem to present critical terms while others are unjustified or just plain puzzling. Special attention is paid to Tex Avery, and Chuck Jones's *Roadrunner* series, but also Canadian cartoons such as *The Cat Came Back* and *Special Delivery*.

In the shorter chapters 5 and 6, 'Issues in representation', and 'Animation and audience', Wells offers more solid arguments and some original work on memory and reception. For Wells, animation problematizes representation, so gender and race are of particular interest. He selects Fleischer's *Popeye* and *Superman* as test-cases for contradictions in maleness, and adds a strong section on the feminist aesthetic, referring to films by Suzan Pitt and Jane Aaron, among others. There is also attention to queering cartoons like *Tom and Jerry*, though I remain uncomfortable with the psychoanalysis of a cartoon cat (it is just paint on cels after all), so the assertion that Jerry the cat has latent homosexual tendencies is less convincing than that critics may project such traits onto fictional characters. Chapter 5 has a brief section on race, but could use more reference to Native Americans, Hispanics, and Asians. Chapter 6 on 'Audience' explains 1930s and 1940s audience surveys for films like *Fantasia*, and Wells's own survey of 435 adults in which he asked them to recall their own first memories of seeing Disney films: 'I wanted to evaluate the actual experience of viewing Disney films from the adult perspective which ultimately shaped and expressed the memory' (p. 231). Many of the observations are quite charming – women remember wanting Cinderella's dress, men and women remember crying in the theatre – but the connections between memory, anecdote and reception need to be fleshed out. Finally, I fear the book's title might more appropriately borrow some of the tentativeness from its chapters and be labelled *Notes Towards Understanding Animation*. Nonetheless, Wells's book will prove enjoyable to animation students, and its lasting value will clearly lie in encouraging us all to seek out less canonical films like *A is for Autism* and *Asparagus* to add to our animation canon.

By contrast, Sandler's *Reading the Rabbit* focuses on one studio's

output. As his Introduction explains, Sandler is interested in the clash between the more rebellious *Bugs Bunny* of the past and the recent Time/Warner attempts like *Space Jam* to homogenize Bugs, Elmer, and the gang: 'The controlled lunacy that characterizes Warner Brothers animation is in danger of becoming an endearing afterthought to the retail buck' (p. 7). Sandler complains at length about the repression of the less politically correct Warner Brothers cartoons, celebrating the audacity of the past, when Bugs could insult ethnic groups in titles like *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips*, and Sandler decries the 1970s Bugs Bunny/Road Runner Show which 'cut scenes in which characters engaged in gunplay, ingested motor fuel . . . used cowboy-and-Indian gags or racial humor' (p. 9). The villain here is corporate fear and indecision about how to continue exploiting Bugs Bunny, but one wonders whether Sandler would not also complain if Time/Warner did continue to profit from racially insensitive cartoons. Regardless, the Introduction engages the reader with the issues that this well-thought-out anthology will address.

Reading the Rabbit, modelled in part on *Disney Discourse*, presents a solid series of articles, including several canonical, previously published pieces that all address institutional, historical or cultural dimensions of Warner Bros cartoons. The anthology features twelve contributors and thirty-six illustrations. The chapters begin with Barry Putterman's helpful history of Warner Bros cartoons, but at barely nine pages it lacks the sort of economic and institutional depth that would really anchor the book's historical contributions. Tim White's reprinted 'From Disney to Warner Bros: the critical shift', follows nicely, as it puts the rediscovery of Warner Bros during the 1960s into the larger context of film studies. And the placement of the next chapter, 'Charlie Thorson and the temporary Disneyfication of Warner Bros cartoons' by Gene Walz, helps prove that Sandler's overall sense of order and purpose is impressive. Walz reveals how Thorson was brought in from Disney to provide a 'cuteness factor', arguing that while some now lament Thorson's influence in the 1930s, he did help forge the eventual Warner Bros style.

The next two chapters shift more towards content analysis, with Hank Sartin's 'From Vaudeville to Hollywood, from silence to sound', and Michael Frierson's 'The images of the hillbilly in Warner Bros cartoons of the thirties'. Sartin builds a convincing case for re-examining the earliest, transitional Warner cartoons for their lasting influence. Frierson follows up with an interesting study of three 1930s cartoons that reinforce rural, southern, hillbilly stereotypes that began in comic strips and are continued by the music and images of Warner Bros cartoons. Donald Crafton's reprinted 'The view from termite terrace' investigates how caricature and parody, central traits of the Warner Bros studio style, provide ideological assaults on the artists' own institution, and Hollywood in

general. Crafton's clever chapter serves as a turning point as *Reading the Rabbit* shifts more fully towards cultural studies issues.

Terry Lindvall's and Ben Fraser's 'Darker shades of animation', looks at African-American representations to prove cartoons serve as valuable cultural artefacts whose natural ability to exaggerate and parody makes them potent contributors to a racist culture industry. Kirsten Moana Thompson's chapter on 'Pepé le Pew, narcissism, and cats in the casbah', argues that the sixteen Pepé le Pew cartoons are among Chuck Jones's most self-reflexive parodies, based in part on excessive Hollywood images of heterosexual French characters. She investigates how these absurd narratives engage issues of identification and ideology, but comically reminds us that Jones mocks Pepé, who is, after all, a skunk. Sandler's own chapter, 'Gendered evasion', looks at Bugs Bunny in drag to test, among others, Judith Butler's hypothesis that gender attribution is a process of performances, deciding that for Bugs, crossdressing is always finally an operation of disguise. Sandler points out that in the 168 Bugs cartoons, twenty-eight feature Bugs kissing males while only four show him kissing females.

Linda Simensky's 'Selling Bugs Bunny' provides an important case study of the Warner Bros Studio Stores for how their development informs the increasing collaboration between film, television and merchandizing in the 1990s. After outlining the history of marketing cartoon characters, she outlines how the stores, *Space Jam*, and the future of retailing are interrelated, since the need for new products motivates making more animated movies. Bill Mikulak points out, in his rather unruly 'Fans vs Time Warner: who owns Looney Tunes?', that fan websites and news groups have created more than legal challenges for Warner Bros. They produce art, interpretations, internet games and narratives that must be considered within the realm of animation-related materials. Finally, Norman M. Klein provides 'Hybrid cinema: the mask, masques, and Tex Avery', a rather meandering article which connects the hectic chase sequences of Avery and Jones to trends in computer animation, and argues there is indeed a special-effects revolution afoot that may mean 'the collapse of movie culture as we know it', forging a new hybrid product.

Overall, Sandler's anthology is important, and will serve as a much-needed text in Animation classes.

review:

Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies*. London: Routledge, 1997, 226 pp.

PAMELA CHURCH GIBSON

There are certain books that need to be written, that fill a perceived void. Certainly a thorough, feminist examination of dress in the cinema that encompasses both the contemporary and the masculine is long overdue. So, too, is a work of this calibre to join those few works of scholarship that have examined the relationship between clothing, cinema and audience – Pam Cook has spoken of ‘a marginalisation marked enough to be diagnosed as a symptom’.¹ Stella Bruzzi’s declared intention is not only to rescue clothing from ‘its mandatory bridesmaid status’ but to go much further – ‘to reassess and challenge some of the assumptions and truisms that have dominated the study of dress, gender and sexuality and to recontextualise others by applying them to cinema’ (p. xvii). She argues in her introduction that, in cinema, ‘clothing can be seen to construct an independent discursive strategy . . . that clothes can function independently of the body, character and narrative’ (p. 3). She refutes the assumption that fashion is ‘produced for the consumption of the opposite sex’ (p. xvii), and legitimizes the examination of dress as a feminist concern here and throughout. The book uses not only the insights provided by psychoanalysis, as previous writers in the field have done, but incorporates very recent work on gender, performativity and queer theory, and the last section of the book takes the reader ‘beyond gender’.

She brings to her subject an extensive and detailed knowledge and understanding of both film and fashion; she is perhaps the first who

¹ Pam Cook, *Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1996).

has chosen to approach the relationship between the two in this particular way. 'I wanted to do two things', she writes 'to approach the subject of clothes and cinema in an interdisciplinary way, and to focus the discussions within each chapter on a discrete body of films'. She explains her methodology quite clearly: 'Two main axes inform the discussions of specific films in *Undressing Cinema*: the theory, history and art of fashion and costume design, and the debates surrounding the construction of gender and sexuality' (p. xvi).

The first section finds the reader in relatively familiar terrain – firstly, the relationship between cinema and haute couture, and then that between 'Desire and the Costume Film'. The work of those from other disciplines deployed here may be unfamiliar to those working only within film studies: James Laver, fashion historian, J.C. Flugel, who in 1930, formulated the idea of the 'shifting erogenous zone' and David Kunzle, writer on fashion and fetishism, with particular interest in the phenomenon of 'tight-lacing'. Quotations from these and other writers on dress are to be found alongside those more usually found in cinema scholarship – Laura Mulvey, Lacan, and Foucault. The interdisciplinary approach provides new and valuable insights. She argues for and substantiates the idea of the female fetishist, setting this against more conventional notions of fetishism in film and demanding a reassessment of what she describes as 'traditional paradigms'. In her examination of the narcissistic, stylish Franco-American gangster, she challenges the 'desexualised representation of men in cinema' (p. 69), which she regards as controlled by the 'prescriptive' nature of Mulvey's work and its legacy. Other recent work on masculinity she sees as adhering in a similar way to 'rigid gender boundaries' (p. 69). Her meticulous examination of her chosen films here illustrates the fluid, complex and problematic nature of the gangster image and notions of masculinity, particularly in recent cinematic texts – *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction* and *Leon*.

The book now moves into less well-charted territory – 'The Screen's Fashioning of Blackness'. Here, she cites the work of bell hooks, Elizabeth Wilson, Fred Davis and Dick Hebdige, chronicler of subcultures, as well as Yvonne Tasker and others better-known within cinema studies. This eclecticism is both refreshing and provocative – this section concludes with her assertion of the need 'to rethink the conflation of style and "racial identity"' (p. 118). Her chapter on contemporary films noirs examines the fraught relationship between feminism and fashion, and challenges the 'monolithic fatalism' of certain contemporary feminist writers. She re-examines the work of Riviere, and suggests that these films work to 'destabilise and weaken the male position . . . question the omniscience of the male gaze' and 'rearticulate the masquerade' (p. 144).

- 2 Charles Eckert, 'The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window', in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds), *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (London: Routledge, 1990).

The last section is arguably the most radical and the most innovative – here 'the radical, performative possibilities of clothing are examined with relation to films that, at their core, are problematizing gender itself. The very last chapter, on androgyny, uses the ideas of Judith Butler and others; the book ends:

one can imagine oneself into a gender, or indeed imagine oneself to be genderless; so costume or clothes are no longer merely forms of consolidation and social communication, but also testaments to fantasy and desire (p. 199).

As this may indicate, the book is far from being merely a discussion of frocks, films and fashion. But these three are central to the text; indeed, she is critical of, even hostile to, the puritanism which has kept them at bay for so long. It is curious, when so much recent work has examined audiences and spectatorship, that so few scholars are willing to scrutinise or even acknowledge that one of the main sources of pleasure for these audiences is costume. Not only pleasure for the audience, but profit for filmmakers, manufacturers and retailers. Eckert wrote in 1978, 'Hollywood gave consumerism a distinctive bent . . . it did as much as any other force in capitalist culture to smooth the operation of the production-consumption cycle'.² The links between cinema and merchandising were centred on the costumes of the stars. Why, then, is there this strange reluctance to carry on the work of Eckert, Jane Gaines, Charlotte Herzog and others? Perhaps Stella Bruzzi should have spoken not only of the 'bridesmaid status' of costume but of the fledgling status of fashion within the academy; to many, it has still to prove its right to be regarded as an academic discipline like any other. Hopefully this book will assist that process.

Perhaps further interdisciplinary work of this kind might follow. There may be those who complain that the book is overly psychoanalytic in its approach. They might wish to advocate other critical strategies – and indeed employ them to examine the role of costume in the creation of both a cinematic and a social identity. A plurality of approaches within this area would be welcome. Some might suggest that the methodology of the book is only applicable to European and American cinema; it is certainly true that the book does not explore other cinemas. Again, maybe those who make this criticism should encourage the examination of the role of dress in other cinemas. And indeed there is a need to widen the debate. This book can be seen as an important intervention. Meticulous in its research, fascinating in its breadth of approach and elegantly written, it is also extremely enjoyable.

CUMULATIVE INDEX

Screen, volumes 31–40

(1990–99)

AHMED, SARA

review: Lola Young, Fear of the Dark: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema, vol. 37, no. 4 (1996), pp. 409–14.

AITKEN, IAN

Distraction and redemption: Kracauer, surrealism and phenomenology, vol. 39, no. 2 (1998), pp. 124–40.

ALEXANDER, KAREN

review: Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other: Writing, Postcoloniality and Feminism, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993), pp. 85–7.

ALLAN, STUART and CYNTHIA CARTER

report: Cultural Studies Conference: Sheffield City Polytechnic, vol. 31, no. 3 (1990), pp. 331–3.

ALLEN, JEANNE THOMAS and BARRY KING

report: The American Society for Cinema Studies Conference 1990, vol. 31, no. 4 (1990), pp. 435–8.

ALLEN, ROBERT C.

From exhibition to reception: reflections on the audience in film history, vol. 31, no. 4 (1990), pp. 347–56.

ALLOR, MARTIN

report: Cultural métissage: national formations and productive discourse in Québec cinema and television, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993), pp. 69–75.

ALLOR, MARTIN

review: Ien Ang, Desperately Seeking the Audience; James Lull, Inside Family Viewing, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993), pp. 99–102.

ANG, IEN and JOHN STRATTON

Sylvania Waters and the spectacular exploding family, vol. 35, no. 1 (1994), pp. 1–21.

ANG, IEN

review: Jostein Gripsrud, The Dynasty Years:

Hollywood Television and Critical Media Studies, vol. 37, no. 3 (1996), pp. 317–22.

ARMES, ROY

report: The Third Biennale of Arab Cinema, vol. 38, no. 1 (1997), pp. 84–7.

ARTHURS, JANE

report: Spot the Difference: BBC Conference on Women in Television, vol. 32, no. 4 (1991), pp. 447–51.

AYISI, FLORENCE and CAROL SIDNEY

report: Africa and the History of Cinematic Ideas Conference, vol. 37, no. 1 (1996), pp. 85–9.

BAERT, RENEE

Desiring daughters, vol. 34, no. 2 (1993), pp. 109–23.

BAERT, RENEE

Skirting the issue, vol. 35, no. 4 (1994), pp. 354–73.

BALIDES, CONSTANCE

review: Maureen Turim, Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History, vol. 32, no. 1 (1991), pp. 120–25.

BALIDES, CONSTANCE

Scenarios of exposure in everyday life: women in the cinema of attractions, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993), pp. 19–37.

BARR, DAMIAN

report: The Second International Transgender Film and Video Festival, vol. 40, no. 2 (1999), pp. 214–17.

BECKER, KARIN

debate: Ritual. The Diana Debate, continued, vol. 39, no. 3 (1998), pp. 289–93.

BENNETT, BRUCE and IMOGEN TYLER

report: Screen Studies Conference 1999, vol. 40, no. 1 (1999), pp. 96–100.

BENSON, PETER

Screening desire, vol. 31, no. 4 (1990), pp. 377–89.

BOBO, JACQUELINE and ELLEN SEITER

Black feminism and media criticism: *The Women of Brewster Place*, vol. 32, no. 3 (1991), pp. 286–302.

BODDY, WILLIAM

Alternative television in the United States, vol. 31, no. 1 (1990), pp. 91–101.

BODDY, WILLIAM

'Spread like a monster blanket all over the country': CBS and television, 1929–33, vol. 32, no. 2 (1991), pp. 173–83.

BODDY, WILLIAM

Archaeologies of electronic vision and the gendered spectator, vol. 35, no. 2 (1994), pp. 105–22.

BOLIN, GÖRAN and MICHAEL FORSMAN

debate: Film studies in Sweden: cinema arts and back again?, vol. 37, no. 3 (1996), pp. 294–302.

BOLIN, GÖRAN and MICHAEL FORSMAN

debate: Film Studies in Sweden: reply to Jan Olsson, vol. 39, no. 1 (1998), pp. 91–2.

BONNIGAL, DOROTHEE

review: Lesley Stern, *The Scorsese Connection*, vol. 39, no. 3 (1998), pp. 323–6.

BORN, GEORGINA

Against negation, for a politics of cultural production: Adorno, aesthetics, the social, vol. 34, no. 3 (1993), pp. 223–42.

BOTTING, FRED and SCOTT WILSON

debate: Automatic lover. Special Debate: *Crash*, vol. 39, no. 2 (1998), pp. 186–92.

BRAUERHOCH, ANNETTE

report: VIPER International Film and Video Convention, vol. 33, no. 3 (1992), pp. 321–3.

BROWN, BEVERLEY

review: Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible*, vol. 32, no. 1 (1991), pp. 114–19.

BROWN, JEFFREY A.

'Putting on the Ritz': masculinity and the young Gary Cooper, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), pp. 193–213.

BRUNO, GIULIANA

review: Giampiero Brunetta, *Buio in sala*:

cent'anni dipassioni dello spettatore cinematografico, vol. 32, no. 2 (1991), pp. 228–33.

BRUNSDON, CHARLOTTE

Problems with quality, vol. 31, no. 1 (1990), pp. 67–90.

BRUNSDON, CHARLOTTE

Pedagogies of the feminine: feminist teaching and women's genres, vol. 32, no. 4 (1991), pp. 364–81.

BRUNSDON, CHARLOTTE

Structures of anxiety: recent British television crime fiction, vol. 39, no. 3 (1998), pp. 223–43.

BRUNT, ROSALIND

debate: Icon. Special Debate: Flowers and tears: the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, vol. 39, no. 1 (1998), pp. 68–70.

BRUZZI, STELLA

debate: Tempestuous petticoats: costume and desire in *The Piano*. *The Piano Debate*, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), pp. 257–66.

BUCKLAND, WARREN

Between science fact and science fiction: Spielberg's digital dinosaurs, possible worlds, and the new aesthetic realism, vol. 40, no. 2 (1999), pp. 177–92.

BURGOYNE, ROBERT

National identity, gender identity and the 'rescue fantasy' in *Born on the Fourth of July*, vol. 35, no. 3 (1994), pp. 211–34.

BUTLER, ALISON

review: Veve A. Clark, Millicent Hodson and Catrina Neiman, *The Legend of Maya Deren: Volume 1, Part One, Signatures (1917–1942)* and *The Legend of Maya Deren: Volume 1, Part Two, Chambers (1942–1947)*, vol. 33, no. 1 (1992), pp. 110–16.

BUTLER, ALISON

debate: New film histories and the politics of location, vol. 33, no. 4 (1992), pp. 413–26.

BUTLER, ALISON

report: The last/vision machine, vol. 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 408–17.

BUTLER, ALISON

review: Roswitha Mueller, *Valie Export: Fragments of the Imagination*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1996), pp. 95–9.

CAGLE, CHRIS

review: Lynn Spigel and Michael Curtin (eds), *The Revolution Wasn't Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict*, vol. 39, no. 2 (1998), pp. 219–22.

CARTER, CYNTHIA and STUART ALLAN

report: Cultural Studies Conference: Sheffield City Polytechnic, vol. 31, no. 3 (1990), pp. 331–3.

CARTER, ERICA

review: Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds), *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, vol. 32, no. 4 (1991), pp. 483–90.

CARTER, ERICA

review: Sandra Frieden, Richard McCormick, Vibeke R. Petersen and Laurie Melissa Vogelsang (eds), *Gender and German Cinema, Volumes I and II*, vol. 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 441–7.

CARTWRIGHT, LISA

report: Society for Animation Studies Conference, vol. 33, no. 2 (1992), pp. 201–4.

CARTWRIGHT, LISA

review: Hamid Naficy, *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1995), pp. 159–67.

CASETTI, FRANCESCO

Cinema in the cinema in Italian films of the fifties: *Bellissima* and *La signora senza camelie*, vol. 33, no. 4 (1992), pp. 375–93.

CAUGHIE, JOHN and SIMON FRITH

report: The British Film Institute: re-tooling the culture industry, vol. 31, no. 2 (1990), pp. 214–22.

CAUGHIE, JOHN

Adorno's reproach: repetition, difference and television genre, vol. 32, no. 2 (1991), pp. 127–53.

CHANAN, MICHAEL

report: The changing geography of Third Cinema, vol. 38, no. 4 (1997), pp. 372–88.

CHANAN, MICHAEL

review: Paulo Antonio Paranagua (ed.), *Mexican Cinema*; Randall Johnson and Robert Stam (eds), *Brazilian Cinema*, vol. 38, no. 4 (1997), pp. 404–8.

CHISHOLM, DIANNE

review: Peter Brunette and David Wills,

Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory, vol. 34, no. 2 (1993), pp. 190–95.

CHURCH GIBSON, PAMELA

review: Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies*, vol. 40, no. 4 (1999), pp. 472–4.

COLLINS, RICHARD

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debate: Wound envy: touching Cronenberg's *Crash*. The *Crash* Debate, continued, vol. 40, no. 2 (1999), pp. 193–202.
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report: Society for Cinema Studies Conference 1992, vol. 33, no. 4 (1992), pp. 436–8.
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review: (Dis)engaging characters: a response to Lynne Pearce's review, vol. 40, no. 3 (1999), pp. 358–63.
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'This business of America': fan mail, film reception and Meet John Doe, vol. 37, no. 2 (1996), pp. 111–28.
- SOILA, TYTTI
Five Songs of the Scarlet Flower, vol. 35, no. 3 (1994), pp. 265–74.
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Expanding film into digital media, vol. 40, no. 2 (1999), pp. 131–45.
- SPIGEL, LYNN
From the dark ages to the golden age: women's memories and TV reruns, vol. 36, no. 1 (1995), pp. 16–33.
- SPRINGER, CLAUDIA
The pleasure of the interface, vol. 32, no. 3 (1991), pp. 303–23.
- STACEY, JACKIE
debate: Textual obsessions: methodology, history and researching female spectatorship, vol. 34, no. 3 (1993), pp. 260–74.
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Hollywood memories, vol. 35, no. 4 (1994), pp. 317–35.
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Is any girl safe? Female spectators at the white slave films, vol. 37, no. 1 (1996), pp. 1–15.
- STEENVELD, LYNETTE and LARRY STRELITZ
1922 and South African television, vol. 35, no. 1 (1994), pp. 36–50.
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report: Cinema Studies in the Age of Global Media, vol. 38, no. 2 (1997), pp. 195–9.

STEWART, MICHAEL

report: BFI Melodrama Conference, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993), pp. 80–82.

STILWELL, ROBYNN

review: Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films*; Royal Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music*; George Burt, *The Art of Film Music*; Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, vol. 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 432–40.

STILWELL, ROBYNN

Symbol, narrative and the musics of *Truly, Madly, Deeply*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1997), pp. 60–75.

STILWELL, ROBYNN

report: Film Music Conference, vol. 40, no. 1 (1999), pp. 100–102.

STODDART, HELEN

report: Screen Studies Conference 1992, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993), pp. 82–4.

STONEMAN, ROD

Sins of commission, vol. 33, no. 2 (1992), pp. 127–44.

STRAAYER, CHRIS

The She-man: postmodern bi-sexed performance in film and video, vol. 31, no. 3 (1990), pp. 262–80.

STRATTON, JOHN and IEN ANG

Sylvania Waters and the spectacular exploding family, vol. 35, no. 1 (1994), pp. 1–21.

STRAW, WILL

report: Society for Animation Studies Conference 1990, vol. 32, no. 2 (1991), pp. 220–22.

STRAW, WILL

report: Film studies in Canada, vol. 34, no. 2 (1993), pp. 176–8.

STRAW, WILL

report: Letter from Canada, vol. 36, no. 1 (1995), pp. 63–4.

STRAW, WILL

review: Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory – Music, Television and Popular Culture*, vol. 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 448–50.

STREET, SARAH

review: Sue Harper, *Picturing the Past: the Rise*

and Fall of the British Costume Film, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), pp. 288–91.

STREET, SARAH

review: Kenton Bamford, *Distorted Images: British National Identity and Film in the 1920s*; Jeffrey Richards (ed.), *The Unknown Thirties: an Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929–1939*, vol. 40, no. 4 (1999), pp. 457–60.

STREIBLE, DAN

report: Society for Cinema Studies Conference 1993, vol. 34, no. 4 (1993), pp. 404–6.

STRELITZ, LARRY and LYNETTE STEENVELD

1922 and South African television, vol. 35, no. 1 (1994), pp. 36–50.

STRINGER, JULIAN

‘Your tender smiles give me strength’: paradigms of masculinity in John Woo’s *A Better Tomorrow* and *The Killer*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1997), pp. 25–41.

SWANSON, GILLIAN

review: Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*; Jackie Byars, *All That Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama*; Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, vol. 34, no. 2 (1993), pp. 179–89.

TARR, CARRIE

Questions of identity in Beur cinema: from *Tea in the Harem* to *Cheb*, vol. 34, no. 4 (1993), pp. 321–42.

TASHIRO, CHARLES SHIRO

review: Ann Gray, *Video Playtime: the Gendering of a Leisure Technology*; Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and Family Ideal in Postwar America*, vol. 35, no. 4 (1994), pp. 411–15.

TAYLOR, BARRY

review: Joan Copjec (ed.), *Shades of Noir: a Reader*; Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre and Masculinity*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1995), pp. 172–8.

TAYLOR, IAN

The film reviews of Winifred Horrabin 1927–45, vol. 33, no. 2 (1992), pp. 174–83.

TAYLOR, NORMAN

Re-presenting the field of restricted cultural

- production: the nude at the interface, vol. 37, no. 1 (1996), pp. 16–29.
- TEMPLE, MICHAEL
debate: The Nutty Professor: teaching film with Jean-Luc Godard. The Godard Dossier, vol. 40, no. 3 (1999), pp. 323–30.
- THOMPSON, FELIX
 Metaphors of space: polarization, dualism and Third World cinema, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993), pp. 38–53.
- THOMPSON, KRISTIN
report: The Pordenone Film Festival 1989, vol. 31, no. 1 (1990), pp. 110–11.
- THUMIM, JANET
 The ‘popular’, cash and culture in the postwar British cinema industry, vol. 32, no. 3 (1991), pp. 245–71.
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 ‘A live commercial for icing sugar.’ Researching the historical audience: gender and broadcast television in the 1950s, vol. 36, no. 1 (1995), pp. 48–55.
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report: Console-ing Passions Conference 1996, vol. 37, no. 4 (1996), pp. 392–6.
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review: Sharon Willis, *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film*; Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel (eds), *Race and the Subject of Masculinities*, vol. 39, no. 4 (1998), pp. 410–15.
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 Silver sling-backs and Mexican melodrama: *Salón México* and *Danzón*, vol. 38, no. 4 (1997), pp. 360–71.
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Inangbayan, the mother-nation, in Lino Brock’s *Bayan Ko: Kapit sa Patalim* and *Orapronobis*, vol. 37, no. 4 (1996), pp. 368–88.
- TYLER, IMOGEN and BRUCE BENNETT
report: Screen Studies Conference 1999, vol. 40, no. 1 (1999), pp. 96–100.
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 How many times shall Shakespeare bleed in sport: Shakespeare and the cultural debate about moving pictures, vol. 31, no. 3 (1990), pp. 243–61.
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 Addressing the spectator of a ‘third world’ national cinema: the Bombay ‘social’ film of the 1940s and 1950s, vol. 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 305–24.
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review: Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema*, vol. 31, no. 4 (1990), pp. 454–7.
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report: The 12th Créteil International Women’s Film Festival, vol. 31, no. 3 (1990), pp. 323–8.
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report: Créteil Women’s Film Festival, vol. 32, no. 4 (1991), pp. 435–42.
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 France 1945–65 and Hollywood: the *policier* as inter-national text, vol. 33, no. 1 (1992), pp. 50–80.
- VINCENDEAU, GINETTE
 Gerard Depardieu: the axiom of contemporary French cinema, vol. 34, no. 4 (1993), pp. 343–61.
- VINCENDEAU, GINETTE
review: Dudley Andrew, *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film*, vol. 37, no. 2 (1996), pp. 218–20.
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 Reverence, rape – and then revenge: popular Hindi cinema’s ‘woman’s film’, vol. 40, no. 1 (1999), pp. 17–37.
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report: Culture Shocks: The Future of Culture; Pacific Spaces/Global Marketplaces: Cultural Studies in Pacific Contexts, vol. 40, no. 2 (1999), pp. 212–14.
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 Moving images: on travelling film and video, vol. 37, no. 4 (1996), pp. 336–50.

WESTLAKE, MICHAEL and ROBERT LAPSLEY

From *Casablanca* to *Pretty Woman*: the politics of romance, vol. 33, no. 1 (1992), pp. 27–49.

WESTWELL, GUY

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WHISSEL, KRISTEN

Racialized spectacle, exchange relations and the Western in *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1996), pp. 41–67.

WHISSEL, KRISTEN

Uncle Tom, Goldilocks and the Rough Riders: race, nation and empire in the 'Cinema of Attractions', vol. 40, no. 4 (1999), pp. 384–404.

WHITE, CHRISTOPHER

debate: After the classic, the classical and ideology: the differences of realism, vol. 35, no. 3 (1994), pp. 275–92.

WHITE, MIMI

Women, memory and serial melodrama, vol. 35, no. 4 (1994), pp. 336–53.

WILLEMEN, PAUL

Bangkok–Bahrain to *Berlin–Jerusalem*: Amos Gitai's editing, vol. 33, no. 1 (1992), pp. 14–26.

WILLIAMS, ALAN

review: Jacques Aumont, *L'Oeil interminable: cinéma et peinture*, vol. 32, no. 2 (1991), pp. 234–7.

WILLIAMS, JAMES S.

debate: The signs amongst us: Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. The Godard Dossier, vol. 40, no. 3 (1999), pp. 306–15.

WILLIAMSON, DUGALD

review: Keith Selby and Ron Cowderly, *How to Study Television*, vol. 39, no. 3 (1998), pp. 306–12.

WILSON, DAVID

debate: Inside observations, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993), pp. 76–79.

WILSON, EMMA

Three Colours: Blue: Kieslowski, colour and the postmodern subject, vol. 39, no. 4 (1998), pp. 349–62.

WILSON, KRISTI

Time, space and vision: Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now*, vol. 40, no. 3 (1999), pp. 277–94.

WILSON, SCOTT and FRED BOTTING

debate: Automatic lover. Special Debate: *Crash*, vol. 39, no. 2 (1998), pp. 186–92.

WILSON, TONY

Reading the postmodernist image: a 'cognitive mapping', vol. 31, no. 4 (1990), pp. 390–407.

WITT, MICHAEL

debate: Introduction. Jean Luc Godard: *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–1998). The Godard Dossier, vol. 40, no. 3 (1999), pp. 304–5

WITT, MICHAEL

debate: The death(s) of cinema according to Godard. The Godard Dossier, vol. 40, no. 3 (1999), pp. 331–46.

WOOD, AYLISH

report: Deviant Imaging: Lesbian/Gay/Queer – Film Conference, vol. 39, no. 4 (1998), pp. 407–9.

WOOD, MARY P.

review: Cinema, Identity, History: an International Conference on British Cinema, vol. 40, no. 1 (1999), pp. 94–6.

XAVIER, ISMAIL

The humiliation of the father: melodrama and Cinema Novo's critique of conservative modernization, vol. 38, no. 4 (1997), pp. 329–44.

YOUNG, LOLA

review: Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers*; Marie Gillespie, *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change*, vol. 37, no. 4 (1996), pp. 400–408.

ZURBRUGG, NICHOLAS

Jameson's complaint: video-art and the intertextual 'time-wall', vol. 32, no. 1 (1991), pp. 16–34.

Index of books reviewed, *Screen*, volumes 31–40 (1990–99)

ABEL, RICHARD

The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896–1914, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), pp. 292–6. (Susan Hayward).

ADAMS, PARVEEN

The Emptiness of the Image, vol. 37, no. 3 (1996), pp. 307–11. (Whedbee Mullen).

ADORNO, THEODOR and HANNES EISLER

Composing for the Films, vol. 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 432–40. (Robynn Stilwell).

AITKEN, IAN

Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement, vol. 32, no. 3 (1991), pp. 350–56. (Andrew Higson).

AITKEN, IAN (ed.)

The Documentary Film Movement: an Anthology, vol. 40, no. 3 (1999), pp. 348–53. (Myra Macdonald).

ALLEN, ROBERT C. (ed.)

Channels of Discourse, vol. 31, no. 1 (1990), pp. 113–18. (James Donald).

ALTMAN, RICK

The American Film Musical, vol. 31, no. 1 (1990), pp. 119–24. (Anahid Kassabian).

ANDREW, DUDLEY

Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film, vol. 37, no. 2 (1996), pp. 218–20. (Ginette Vincendeau).

ANG, IEN

Desperately Seeking the Audience, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993), pp. 99–102. (Martin Allor).

ASTON, LESLEY and PAUL BONNER

Independent Television in Britain, Volume 5. ITV & IBA 1981–92: the Old Relationship Changes, vol. 40, no. 4 (1999), pp. 461–6. (Marc Scholes).

AUMONT, JACQUES

L'Oeil interminable: cinéma et peinture, vol. 32, no. 2 (1991), pp. 234–7. (Alan Williams).

BAD OBJECT CHOICES

How Do I Look: Queer Film and Video, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993), pp. 88–93. (Alan McKee).

BALSAMO, ANNE

Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women, vol. 38, no. 3 (1997), pp. 296–301. (Sean Cubitt).

BAMFORD, KENTON

Distorted Images: British National Identity and Film in the 1920s, vol. 40, no. 4 (1999), pp. 457–60. (Sarah Street).

BARKER, ADAM and THOMAS ELSAESSER (eds)

Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative, vol. 33, no. 1 (1992), pp. 103–9. (Norman King).

BENDER, GRETCHEN and TIMOTHY DRUCKREY (eds)

Culture on the Brink: Ideologies of Technology, vol. 38, no. 1 (1997), pp. 88–92. (Roger Silverstone).

BFI VIDEOS

Early Cinema: Primitives and Pioneers, vol. 33, no. 1 (1992), pp. 103–9. (Norman King).

BOBO, JACQUELINE

Black Women as Cultural Readers, vol. 37, no. 4 (1996), pp. 400–408. (Lola Young).

BODDY, WILLIAM

Fifties Television: the Industry and its Critics, vol. 33, no. 3 (1992), pp. 335–41. (Joy Leman).

BONNER, PAUL and LESLEY ASTON

Independent Television in Britain, Volume 5. ITV & IBA 1981–92: the Old Relationship Changes, vol. 40, no. 4 (1999), pp. 461–6. (Marc Scholes).

BORCHERS, HANS, ELLEN SEITER, GABRIELE KREUTZNER

and EVA-MARIA WARTH (eds)

Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power, vol. 32, no. 4 (1991), pp. 477–82. (Philip Schlesinger).

BORDWELL, DAVID

Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the

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- BOYLE, DEIRDRE
Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited, vol. 40, no. 1 (1999), pp. 120–22. (Heather Osborne).
- BROWN, MARY ELLEN (ed.)
Television and Women's Culture, vol. 33, no. 1 (1992), pp. 122–6. (Patricia Holland).
- BROWN, ROYAL
Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music, vol. 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 432–40. (Robynn Stilwell).
- BRUNETTA, GIAMPIERO
Buio in sala: cent'anni di passioni dello spettatore cinematografico, vol. 32, no. 2 (1991), pp. 228–33. (Giuliana Bruno).
- BRUNETTE, PETER and DAVID WILLS
Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory, vol. 34, no. 2 (1993), pp. 190–95. (Dianne Chisholm).
- BRUZZI, STELLA
Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies, vol. 40, no. 4 (1999), pp. 472–4. (Pamela Church Gibson).
- BUCKINGHAM, DAVID
Moving Images: Understanding Children's Emotional Responses to Television, vol. 38, no. 1 (1997), pp. 93–8. (David Oswell).
- BURCH, NOËL
Life to those Shadows, vol. 33, no. 1 (1992), pp. 103–9. (Norman King).
- BURT, GEORGE
The Art of Film Music, vol. 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 432–40. (Robynn Stilwell).
- BUSCOMBE, EDWARD and ROBERTA PEARSON (eds)
Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western, vol. 40, no. 3 (1999), pp. 354–7. (Edward Gallafent).
- BYARS, JACKIE
All That Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama, vol. 34, no. 2 (1993), pp. 179–89. (Gillian Swanson).
- CAMERA OBSCURA
nos 20–21, vol. 32, no. 3 (1991), pp. 339–44. (Sandra Kemp).
- CARPENTER, HUMPHREY
Dennis Potter: a Biography, vol. 40, no. 2 (1999), pp. 223–8. (Philip Simpson).
- CHION, MICHEL
Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen, vol. 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 432–40. (Robynn Stilwell).
- CHRISTIE, IAN and RICHARD TAYLOR (eds)
Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema, vol. 33, no. 3 (1992), pp. 327–30. (Tony Pearson).
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no. 51, 'Le cinéma d'animation', vol. 33, no. 4 (1992), pp. 446–9. (Jill McGreal).
- CINÉMACTION
no. 67, 'Vingt ans de theories feministes sur le cinema', vol. 35, no. 4 (1994), pp. 407–10. (Chris Holmlund).
- CLARK, VEVE A., MILLICENT HODSON and CATRINA NEIMAN
The Legend of Maya Deren: Volume 1, Part One, Signatures (1917–1942) and The Legend of Maya Deren: Volume 1, Part Two, Chambers (1942–1947), vol. 33, no. 1 (1992), pp. 110–16. (Alison Butler).
- CLAUSIUS, CLAUDIA
The Gentleman is a Tramp, vol. 31, no. 4 (1990), pp. 458–61. (Andy Medhurst).
- CLOVER, CAROL
Men Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film, vol. 36, no. 1 (1995), pp. 75–8. (Lizzie Francke).
- COHAN, STEVEN and INA RAE HARK (eds)
Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema, vol. 35, no. 4 (1994), pp. 400–406. (Lee Grieveson).
- COLLINS, JIM
Uncommon Cultures: Popular Culture and Post-Modernism, vol. 31, no. 2 (1990), pp. 231–5. (Simon Frith).
- COLLINS, RICHARD
New Media, New Policies: Media and Communications Strategies for the Future, vol. 39, no. 1 (1998), pp. 93–9. (David Oswell).
- COOK, JOHN R.
Dennis Potter: a Life on the Screen, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 223–8. (Philip Simpson).
- COPIEC, JOAN (ed.)
Shades of Noir: a Reader, vol. 36, no. 2 (1995), pp. 172–8. (Barry Taylor).

- CORNER, JOHN (ed.)
Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History, vol. 33, no. 4 (1992), pp. 455–61. (Bill Schwartz).
- COWDERY, RON and KEITH SELBY
How to Study Television, vol. 39, no. 3 (1998), pp. 306–12. (Dugald Williamson).
- CRAFTON, DONALD
Emile Cohl: Caricature and Film, vol. 33, no. 4 (1992), pp. 441–5. (Leslie Felperin Sharman).
- CREEBER, GLEN
Dennis Potter: Between Two Worlds. A Critical Reassessment, vol. 40, no. 2 (1999), pp. 223–8. (Philip Simpson).
- CREED, BARBARA
The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis, vol. 36, no. 1 (1995), pp. 75–8. (Lizzie Francke).
- CRISP, COLIN
The Classic French Cinema, 1930–1960, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), pp. 292–6. (Susan Hayward).
- CUBITT, SEAN
Digital Aesthetics, vol. 40, no. 2 (1999), pp. 218–22. (Laura U. Marks).
- CURTIN, MICHAEL and LYNN SPIGEL (eds)
The Revolution Wasn't Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict, vol. 39, no. 2 (1998), pp. 219–22. (Chris Cagle).
- D'ACCI, JULIE
Defining Women: Television and the Case of Cagney and Lacey, vol. 36, no. 2 (1995), pp. 168–71. (Christine Geraghty).
- DEBORD, GUY
Comments on the Society of the Spectacle, vol. 32, no. 4 (1991), pp. 491–4. (Paul McDonald).
- DELEUZE, GILLES
Cinema 1: the Movement-Image and Cinema 2: The Time-Image, vol. 32, no. 2 (1991), pp. 238–43. (Paul Patton).
- DENZIN, NORMAN K.
Images of Postmodern Society: Social Theory and Contemporary Cinema and The Cinematic Society, the Voyeur's Gaze, vol. 37, no. 4 (1996), pp. 424–7. (Catherine Constable).
- DERY, MARK (ed.)
Flame Wars: a Discourse of Cyberculture, vol. 37, no. 1 (1996), pp. 100–105. (Clare Harwood).
- DOANE, MARY ANN
Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis, vol. 34, no. 2 (1993), pp. 179–89. (Gillian Swanson).
- DONALD, JAMES (ed.)
Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds, vol. 32, no. 3 (1991), pp. 329–38. (Susannah Radstone).
- DOYLE, JENNIFER, JONATHAN FLATLEY and ESTEBAN MUÑOZ (eds)
Pop Out: Queer Warhol, vol. 38, no. 2 (1997), pp. 200–204. (Michael O'Pray).
- DRUCKREY, TIMOTHY and GRETCHEN BENDER (eds)
Culture on the Brink: Ideologies of Technology, vol. 38, no. 1 (1997), pp. 88–92. (Roger Silverstone).
- DYER, RICHARD
Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993), pp. 88–93. (Alan McKee).
- DYER, RICHARD
White, vol. 40, no. 1 (1999), pp. 115–19. (Dimitris Eleftheriotis).
- EISLER, HANNS and THEODOR ADORNO
Composing for the Films, vol. 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 432–40. (Robynn Stilwell).
- ELSAESSER, THOMAS with ADAM BARKER (eds)
Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative, vol. 33, no. 1 (1992), pp. 103–9. (Norman King).
- FISCHER, LUCY
Shot/Counter-shot: Film Tradition and Women's Cinema, vol. 32, no. 1 (1991), pp. 109–13. (Jane M. Gaines).
- FISKE, JOHN
Television Culture, vol. 31, no. 1 (1990), pp. 113–18. (James Donald).
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Pop Out: Queer Warhol, vol. 38, no. 2 (1997), pp. 200–204. (Michael O'Pray).
- FLITTERMAN-LEWIS, SANDY
To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema, vol. 31, no. 4 (1990), pp. 454–7. (Ginette Vincendeau).
- FORBES, JILL

- The Cinema in France after the New Wave*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1994), pp. 96–9. (Christine Scollen-Jimack).
- FORO-HISPÁNICO
'Ibero-América y el cine', vol. 38, no. 4 (1997), pp. 398–403. (Catherine Grant).
- FOX, ELIZABETH
Latin American Broadcasting: from Tango to Telenova, vol. 38, no. 4 (1997), pp. 398–403. (Catherine Grant).
- FRAMEWORK
nos 32–33,, vol. 31, no. 4 (1990), pp. 446–53. (Ravi Vasudevan).
- FRIEDEN, SANDRA, RICHARD McCORMICK, VIBEKE R. PETERSEN and LAURIE MELISSA VOGELSANG (eds)
Gender and German Cinema, Volumes I and II, vol. 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 441–7. (Erica Carter).
- FRIEDMAN, LESTER (ed.)
British Cinema and Thatcherism: Fires were Started, vol. 35, no. 1 (1994), pp. 100–103. (Jane Sillars).
- GAINES, JANE and CHARLOTTE HERZOG (eds)
Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body, vol. 32, no. 4 (1991), pp. 483–90. (Erica Carter).
- GALLAFENT, EDWARD
Clint Eastwood: Actor and Director, vol. 37, no. 2 (1996), pp. 221–4. (Paul McDonald).
- GERAGHTY, CHRISTINE
Women and Soap Opera, vol. 33, no. 1 (1992), pp. 122–6. (Patricia Holland).
- GIBSON, ROSS
Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia, vol. 35, no. 3 (1994), pp. 311–15. (Alan McKee).
- GIERI, MANUELA
Contemporary Italian Filmmaking: Strategies of Subversion. Pirandello, Fellini, Scola and the Directors of the New Generation, vol. 38, no. 2 (1997), pp. 210–13. (Cristina Degli-Eposti).
- GILLESPIE, MARIE
Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change, vol. 37, no. 4 (1996), pp. 400–408. (Lola Young).
- GLEDHILL, CHRISTINE (ed.)
Stardom: Industry of Desire, vol. 34, no. 2 (1993), pp. 179–89. (Gillian Swanson).
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